"This lucid and elegantly written study expounds a central and, for many, baffling, feature of Balthasar's thought: exaltation (fulfillment) is only possible through humiliation (self-emptying). Sigurd Lefsrud does an admirable job in explaining the metaphysical, christological, and trinitarian background to this key Balthasarian conviction, and the ways in which it both does and does not correspond to the deification thinking of the Greek Fathers and their successors, the Byzantine theologians. By alerting the reader to parallels or divergences in Western Catholic and Lutheran (and other Protestant) approaches, his book should facilitate a wide-ranging ecumenical discussion of the nature of what Christians mean by 'salvation.'"

—Aidan Nichols, OP

author of *A Key to Balthasar* and *The Shape of Catholic Theology*

"This important book on the theology of deification should facilitate dialogue between Eastern and Western Christianity. It deals effectively with difficulties that deification raises for divine transcendence and human creatureliness. The work convincingly illustrates how Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday underpins his teaching on deification."

—Gerald O'Collins, SJ

Professor Emeritus, Pontifical Gregorian University, author of *The Beauty of Jesus Christ*

"Although *theosis*, or deification, has become a well-established concept in modern soteriological thinking, it has not previously been studied adequately in one of its major Western exponents, Hans Urs von Balthasar. Sigurd Lefsrud has produced an important work, drawing together numerous threads running through Balthasar's entire *oeuvre* to give us a richly textured account of a theology in which participation in the divine nature is inherently connected with Christ's self-emptying love. I cannot commend it too highly."

—Norman Russell

Honorary Research Fellow of St Stephen's House, University of Oxford

"Sigurd Lefsrud offers a beautifully written, lucid, intelligent, and generous engagement with Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology of *kenosis* and *theosis*. Tracing the threads of his thought dispersed throughout his works, Lefsrud unveils a glorious tapestry that displays von Balthasar's understanding of the astonishing good news of God's self-emptying in the incarnation and the life of the redeemed as an eternal growth into the likeness of God through participation in Christ. Experts and non-experts alike will benefit from reading this illuminating study."

—Harry O. Maier

Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Studies, Vancouver School of Theology

"These important essays presented here by Sigurd Lefsrud make up a remarkably harmonious book which shows how the life that God gives us through the *Theo-Drama* as *theosis* is gained with *kenosis* and the experience of death. In this academically learned yet spiritually rich book on Balthasar's contribution to the theology of deification, we realize that love is grounded in Christ's self-emptying example. Rooted in the depths of the unified Christian tradition, Lefsrud shows that the ethos of *theosis* is the fruit of a Christology of *kenosis*."

—Maxim Vasiljevic

Bishop, Diocese of Western America, Serbian Orthodox Church

Kenosis in *Theosis*

Fresco of the *Anastasis*, Church of the Holy Savior in Chora. 14th c.

Kenosis in *Theosis*

An Exploration of Balthasar's Theology of Deification

Sigurd Lefsrud

PICKWICK *Publications* • Eugene, Oregon

KENOSIS IN THEOSIS
An Exploration of Balthasar's Theology of Deification

Copyright © 2020 Sigurd Lefsrud. All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical publications or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher. Write: Permissions, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401.

Pickwick Publications
An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

www.wipfandstock.com

PAPERBACK ISBN: 978-1-5326-9368-7
HARDCOVER ISBN: 978-1-5326-9369-4
EBOOK ISBN: 978-1-5326-9370-0

Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Names: Lefsrud, Sigurd, author.

Title: Kenosis in theosis : an exploration of Balthasar's theology of deification / Sigurd Lefsrud.

Description: Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020 | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: ISBN 978-1-5326-9368-7 (paperback) | ISBN 978-1-5326-9369-4 (hardcover) | ISBN 978-1-5326-9370-0 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Balthasar, Hans Urs von, 1905–1988 | Deification (Christianity)—History of doctrines | Catholic Church—Doctrines | Theology

Classification: BX4705.B163 L44 2020 (print) | BX4705.B163 (ebook)

Manufactured in the U.S.A. DECEMBER 23, 2019

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

This work is dedicated to my father, John.
May his memory be eternal.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that though He was rich,
yet for your sakes He became poor,
that you through His poverty might become rich.

—2 CORINTHIANS 8:9

Contents

Preface | ix
Abbreviations | xii

1 Introduction | 1
2 Defining *Theosis* and Kenosis | 9
3 Balthasar's Approach and Method | 28
4 The Analogy of Being | 41
5 *Theosis* in the West and East | 50
6 Knowledge and Mystery | 64
7 The Cleft between the Created and Uncreated | 73
8 Jesus Christ as the Logic of the Cosmos | 89
9 Holy Saturday | 112
10 In the Image of the Trinity | 136
11 Synergy as the Way of Deification | 161
12 The Exploding of the "I" | 180
13 Conclusion | 201

Bibliography | 213

Preface

Of all the great themes in the theology of the Church there is none that encapsulates the gospel message as well as "deification." It took me many years as a pastor, and later as a theologian, to grasp this. Only after wading through various streams of atonement theories, theologies of social justice, and spiritual treatises did I finally come to realize that they all led to the ocean of meaning distilled in the fundamental truth that God desires us to participate in His life—indeed to partake of His very nature (2 Pet 1:4). Thereafter I gained a deeper appreciation of the fact that being nobly created in the "image of God" (Gen 1:26) is only the beginning of understanding the meaning of the human person and Christian existence. For that initial gift from God implies a corresponding purpose and even more magnificent gift that is often overlooked: to attain God's likeness through grace so that we may become fully human and fulfill our destiny as mediators between the created and uncreated. We are designed to live eternally in God's presence, continually growing in love and thereby drawing together with us the entire cosmos into divine life. The doctrine of deification reveals, like nothing else can, that God is both our never-ending End and ever-new Beginning.

When I was first drawn to the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar it was not because of his theology of deification, which I only discovered much later. Rather, his depth of insight struck me, as well as his creative boldness in exploring important undeveloped themes like the transcendent nature of beauty and the soteriological implications of Holy Saturday. Furthermore, I had never before come across a theologian who consistently conveyed the drama of the divine-human relationship with such a sense of immediacy. This was (and still is) vitally important to me, as theology is, more than any of the sciences, the science of *life*—and the fullness of eternal life at

that—only truly fulfilling its right function when it contributes to the health and growth of the human person.

The theology of deification addresses this goal by pointing to the very meaning and purpose of existence so that one is able to more fully understand what spiritual growth is about, and how through God's grace it is accomplished. Since "the grass withers, [and] the flower fades" (Isa 40:8), the only thing truly worthwhile (and really *real*) is that which outlasts death, the seed of faith that emerges through the dark earth and is transformed into something new. The vision of God's extravagant promise epitomized in the theology of deification sets our gaze in the right direction, and by doing so likewise provides the truest lens for perceiving our present reality.

The intent of this work is to explore the central thrust of Balthasar's theology of deification: that it is only rightly understood within the context of God's (and likewise humanity's) kenosis. My goal is therefore limited to focusing on this distinguishing characteristic of Balthasar's theology rather than presenting a comprehensive study of his theology of deification. I chose to do this for two reasons: to bring succinctness to a broad theme that is often densely interwoven with practically every other theological subject in the corpus of Balthasar's writings, and to therefore more effectively highlight his unique contribution. Despite the valuable insights found throughout Balthasar's theology of deification it has nonetheless been overlooked in theological research. Notwithstanding Nicholas Healy's treatment of the theme from an eschatological perspective in a chapter of his book, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, and a recent dissertation on divinization as a hermeneutical criterion in Balthasar's *Theo-Drama* by Silvio do Socorro de Almeida Pereira, there is little written directly on his theology of deification.[1]

One thing that I cannot fail to mention regarding our topic is that it must be approached with reverence and so a sense of reticence since deification is a holy mystery, granted by God as a gift and accomplished in a way unique to each individual. As such the theology in this area cannot be rationalized or systematized to any significant degree, but only "sketched" (an analogy Balthasar likes to use) like a portrait from different angles. This is an appropriate analogy for all of us are in a true sense God's "art," and presuming full comprehension of the work of any artist (let alone God's!) is by definition hubristic overreaching. Given these considerations, my approach is of necessity more apophatic than cataphatic, with far more questions

1. Healy, *Eschatology*; Pereira, *La divinizzazione*. A comparative study is offered in Anderson, *Reclaiming God's Vision*. Short essays that deal with the theme include McInerny, "Sharing in Triune Glory"; Nicola, "Divinization"; Viladesau, "Theosis and Beauty"; Carabine, "Fathers."

raised than answered. In a way, then, the very manner of addressing the theme of *theosis* involves kenosis: a willingness to abandon the drive to categorize and explain must necessarily take place for the sake of truth-telling. As St. John of Damascus rightly asserts,

> But what the substance of God is, or how it is in all things, or how the only-begotten Son, who was God, emptied Himself out and became man from a virgin's blood, being formed by another law that transcended nature, or how He walked dry-shod upon the waters, we neither understand nor can say.[2]

This work could not have been accomplished without the guidance and support of many. I am particularly indebted to the members of the monastic community of the Abbey of New Clairvaux in Vina, California who graciously invited me to live with them for the greater part of two years while doing research and teaching during the final stages of my writing. My sincere thanks goes to those in Melbourne, Australia who greatly contributed to this project: Prof. Tracey Rowland and Dr. Adam Cooper, who supervised my research; Archbishop Denis Hart, who provided diocesan support; and the members of Corpus Christi Seminary and Jesuit Theological College, who welcomed me into their respective communities during my studies. Furthermore, were it not for the inspiration of spiritual companions and guides the theme of this essay would never have come to the forefront of my thought, nor would it have borne fruit. Along those lines, I am especially grateful to Abbot Paul Mark Schwan and Dr. Lee Griffin for meaningful conversations over many years about what it means to live and grow in Christ. Finally, I thank my parents who always inspired me to "seek the face of God" in all things.

—Sigurd Lefsrud
Exaltation of the Holy Cross, 2019.

2. John of Damascus, *Writings*, 168. St. John is paraphrasing Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 2.9 (*PG* 3:648A).

Abbreviations

Works by Balthasar

CL	*Cosmic Liturgy*
EXP	*Explorations in Theology*, vols. I, III, IV
FSO	"The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves"
GL I–VII	*The Glory of the Lord*, vols. I–VII
KB	*The Theology of Karl Barth*
KL	*Kosmische Liturgie*
MP	*Mysterium Paschale*
TA	*A Theological Anthropology*
TD I–V	*Theo-Drama*, vols. I–V
TH	*A Theology of History*
TL I–III	*Theo-Logic*, vols. I–III
WR	*Word and Redemption*

Reference Works

CCC	*Catechism of the Catholic Church*
DS	*Enchiridion Symbolorum*, ed. Denzinger-Schönmetzer
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P Migne
PL	*Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P Migne
ST	*Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas

1

Introduction

God created the human being as "a kind of second world, great in its littleness: another kind of angel, a worshipper of mixed origins . . . standing halfway between greatness and lowliness . . . cared for in this world, transferred to another, and, as the final stage of the mystery, made divine by his inclination towards God."

—GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS[1]

What is the meaning of "man"?[2] What is his origin, purpose, and destiny? In an era when many believe that human beings are merely advanced primates who evolved through chance, that sexual identity is not a biological given but a chosen psycho-social reality, that human life at its most vulnerable moments (in birth and death) has questionable value, it is clear that questions surrounding human dignity and meaning are by no means merely academic but are existentially urgent. We all desire "happiness," but how is this defined? By the individual, society, or an external, objective measure? While manifold answers about what promotes human fulfilment and joy have always been available for us to choose from, history continually reveals that our highest and most noble desires and goals are often tragically thwarted by selfishness and errors of judgement. Therefore, while it is true,

1. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 122.

2. Throughout this work, I will at times refer to humanity in a more traditional way, as "man," for it is a more personal and relational term than the former and often more conducive to discussing our subject matter.

as Thomas Aquinas affirms in his *Summa Theologica*, that "every creature intends to acquire its own perfection, which is the likeness of the divine perfection and goodness,"[3] it is equally obvious that humanity far too often "confound[s] the brilliance of the firmament with the star-shaped footprints of a duck in the mud."[4]

The theme of "deification"—humanity's innate desire to be like God—epitomizes this predicament. It is the underlying *leitmotif* of human existence, humanity's boon and, tragically, bane. For it symbolizes both the most odious pride that has given birth to atrocities and war, and the most virtuous self-sacrifice that has led to the greatest societal and moral achievements. The narrative of Christianity begins and ends with *theosis*, from the sinful eating of the apple in order to "be like God" (Gen 3:5), to the redemptive consuming of Jesus' body and blood in the Eucharist which effects the eschatological promise that we "shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

The Christian understanding of *theosis* directly addresses the issues of humanity's origin, purpose and destiny. More importantly, it provides the very *means* of reaching true fullness of life, not only individually and communally, but on the cosmic scale. For the meaning of *theosis* is grounded on the belief that *eudaimonia* (the Greek philosophical term for "happiness" and/or "fulfillment") consists in knowing God the Creator of all things.[5] Without this objective, metaphysical anchor to illumine our being and guide our actions we are left to the capriciousness of individual opinion that inevitably leads to dissolution and chaos in human life. As Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth-century French scientist, rightly observed,

> For, after all, what is man in nature? A nothing compared to the infinite, a whole compared to the nothing, a middle point between all and nothing, infinitely remote from an understanding of the extremes; the end of things and their principles are unattainably hidden from him in impenetrable secrecy. Equally incapable of seeing the nothingness from which he emerges and the infinity in which he is engulfed.[6]

3. *ST* Ia.44.4.

4. The fuller quote from *Les Misérables*: "The populace is an aged Narcissus which worships itself and applauds the commonplace. . . . They call a painted face beauty and a richly attired figure majesty. They confound the brilliance of the firmament with the star-shaped footprints of a duck in the mud" (Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 64).

5. The Church Fathers consistently make this fundamental point in their theological writings.

6. Pascal, *Pensées*, 204.

The human mind alone cannot comprehend the meaning of things or of human existence since the answers are "unattainably hidden": "visible creation clearly enables us to grasp that there is a Maker, but it does not enable us to grasp His nature."[7] Consequently, the only thing that can give us the capacity to see the truth of who we are as created in the image of God is that which is *super*-natural: divine revelation.

The Lord Jesus Christ "through his immense love became what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."[8] When St. Irenaeus wrote these words in the second century he was among the first of the Church Fathers to begin exploring the scriptural theme of divinization: God's loving intent that man—and through him all creation—might share in His very divinity. Becoming like God presupposes the need for some knowledge of His nature if we are to have any idea about what this actually entails for humanity. As fully God and man, it is Jesus Christ who reveals both the character of the Divine and the epitome of what it means to be truly human. Thus, any exploration of the Christian understanding of *theosis* must inherently focus on the mystery of Christ in his two natures.

Traditionally, "salvation" received through Christ has often been understood primarily as reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of sins. However, the full meaning of salvation goes far beyond that: it is about God's desire and promise that we should "come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). In this way *theosis* is a richer and deeper term than "salvation" for it conveys humanity's final destiny as intended by God—our transformation into a perfection of being that incorporates all physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual dimensions of existence. As St. Maximus the Confessor affirms, *theosis* uniquely encapsulates the very purpose of both creation and redemption: "It is through deification that all things are reconstituted and achieve their permanence; and it is for its sake that what is not is brought into being and given existence."[9]

Therefore, it is not an overstatement to assert that the Christian concept of deification defines the core meaning of human existence (that ever-elusive goal of philosophers through the millennia) by elucidating the nature and purpose of man in light of his eternal destiny. Its breadth of meaning encompasses the major themes of theology and sets its impress on all the sciences. What Balthasar says about Irenaeus's notion of

7. Palmer et al., *Philokalia*, 2:211.

8. "Qui propter immensam dilectionem suam factus est quod sumus nos, uti nos perficeret esse quod est ipse" (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* V. *Praefatio*).

9. Palmer et al., *Philokalia*, 2:173.

recapitulation[10]—which is also about the ultimate unification of the cosmos under Christ the "head"—can equally be said about *theosis*: "The concept retains a characteristic plurality of internally analogous levels which give it its unprecedentedly fertile richness, though it is a richness it must have if it is to express the centre of the mystery and not reduce it to a philosophical proposition."[11] For *theosis* incorporates eschatology, anthropology,[12] soteriology, and most importantly theology proper, since it is defined in relation to the nature of God both in Christ (as human/divine) and as Trinity. What most epitomizes the theme of deification, however, is the simple actuality of *relationship*—between God and humanity, and between humanity and the cosmos—which is traditionally referred to as "synergy." Humanity's union with God is about realizing and accepting God's grace in all of its forms, and so participating in the very life of God *now*, not simply in the afterlife.

Balthasar's Contribution to the Theme

Hans Urs von Balthasar is a valuable guide for exploring all of these facets of *theosis* given both his deep familiarity with the theology of the Church Fathers and astute discourse with modern thought. His breadth of knowledge in philosophy, the arts, and culture affords him a unique ability to convey the immediacy and relevance of the theme in our current era.[13] Balthasar's chief contribution to the theology of deification in Catholic thought lies in its consistent Christological, relational and kenotic thrust. As Cardinal Angela Scola attests, his steady focus on the meaning of Christ's life and redemptive work provides a helpful model for the Church in seeking to truthfully convey not only the heart of Christian faith but the ultimate meaning of human existence:

> If we were to summarize, in a few words, the aspect of Balthasar's thought most fruitful for the Church today and for the new

10. Greek, ἀνακεφαλαίωσις; Latin, *recirculatio.*

11. *GL* II, 51.

12. As the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* affirms: "The root reason for human dignity lies in man's call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of his origin man is already invited to converse with God" (Paul VI, "Gaudium et Spes" 19).

13. Henri de Lubac asserted that "this man is perhaps the most cultivated of his time. If there is a Christian culture, then here it is! Classical antiquity, the great European literatures, the metaphysical tradition, the history of religions, the diverse exploratory adventures of contemporary man and, above all, the sacred sciences, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, patrology (all of it)—not to speak just now of the Bible—none of them that is not welcomed and made vital by this great mind" (De Lubac, *Church*, 105).

> evangelization, we should identify with his invitation to *the Church to return to the center, the Verbum caro factum est*. Even today only the kenotic love of Jesus, in the horizon of self-giving trinitarian love, can illuminate, explain and promote the mission of the Church.[14]

Balthasar's immersion in the thought of the Church Fathers, both in the West and East, is the essential foundation from which he illumines and develops the Church's teaching on deification.[15] Through his commitment to the *ressourcement* movement, which sought a "return to the sources" in theology—particularly the classic theological texts of the patristic era—Balthasar gained substantial knowledge of the writings of the Church Fathers allowing him to dynamically address the theme with integrity.[16] He frequently extols the value of patristic thought, asserting that it conveys a "theological wealth that one finds lacking in later writers. This wealth is indispensable if we are to set forth the Christian's participation in the trinitarian relations and in eternal life, unfolding it without any narrowing of focus in the whole breadth of the *communio sanctorum*."[17] Perhaps the most notable example of Balthasar's mining of this wealth is his commentary on the theology of Maximus the Confessor, *Cosmic Liturgy*, which spurred a revival in Greek patristic studies and is considered a primary text on St. Maximus's theology in both the East and the West.[18] Through this engagement with the theology of the eastern Fathers, he established a rapprochement with Byzantine theology, helping to facilitate greater understanding

14. Scola, "L'apporto," 171.

15. Henri de Lubac highlights Balthasar's immersion in patristic theology: "No matter what subject he is treating, and even if he never mentions any of their names, it is very clear that von Balthasar was formed in the school of the Fathers of the Church. . . . With his customary frankness he criticizes even those he admires and loves most. But their vision has become his own" (De Lubac, *Church,* 114).

16. It is noteworthy to mention that the *ressourcement* movement paralleled a contemporary movement in Orthodoxy, which Georges Florovsky described as a "neopatristic synthesis." While Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, and other Catholic theologians advocated patristic themes and approaches in the West, the same was being done by Vladimir Lossky, Georges Florovsky (and later, John Zizioulas) in the East. See Papanikolaou, *Being With God,* 9.

17. *TD* V, 428. In this text, Balthasar is particularly referring to Irenaeus, Origen, and Augustine.

18. This work, written in 1941, is key for examining Balthasar's theology of deification and will be discussed throughout our study. Although Balthasar has been criticized for not always providing a "sense of historical context" in his treatment of the Fathers—being too busy creatively engaging their work for his own theological purposes—this book is an exception to this tendency and hence a valuable introduction to Maximus's thought. See Daley, "Balthasar's Reading," 202.

between the West and East on many issues including the theology of deification. Balthasar's critical engagement with two of his contemporaries, Erich Przywara and Karl Barth, also played a key role in the development of his theology on the subject. The former, with his metaphysics centered on the *analogia entis* provided Balthasar with the philosophical foundation of his understanding of *theosis*, while the latter's "theology of the cross" significantly influenced his focus on the theme of God's kenosis.[19]

Upon first exploring Balthasar's theology of deification one gets the impression that it is a neglected theme in his work, given that he has no unified approach to the subject. His treatment of the topic is scattered throughout his work, under such diverse headings as eschatology, soteriology and theological aesthetics. Attempting to systematize his thought is therefore a challenge because in his voluminous writings he does not present the subject as a cohesive whole. Furthermore, for the most part he does not use traditional terminology for the concept (such as "deification" and "*theosis*") but prefers to speak of simply "participation" or "union" with God. Nevertheless, upon digging deeper into his theology it soon becomes apparent that Balthasar has an undeniable and pervasive "theology of divinization," for when the diverse fragments of his thought are gathered together they reveal an integrated mosaic. In fact, as we will explore, in countless ways the subject *exemplifies* Balthasar's theological agenda from start to finish, for the communion of God and humanity, founded upon and modeled after God's own communion as three Persons, is the overarching theme of his entire corpus.

Each part of his threefold magnum opus, comprised of the *Theo-Drama*, *Theo-Logic*, and *The Glory of the Lord* (theological aesthetics) begins or ends on the theme of divinization. For example, Balthasar concludes his pentalogy of the *Theo-Drama* with a vision of cosmic divinization, rooted in his understanding of the inner life of the Trinity:

> Through the distinct operations of each of the three Persons, the world acquires an inward share in the divine exchange of life; as a result the world is able to take the divine things it has received from God, together with the gift of being created, and return them to God as a divine gift.[20]

Likewise, he ends his three-volume *Theo-Logic* with a discussion of the beatific vision, concluding the work with a description of the deified state: "Born of the Spirit as we are, we exist in the fire of love in which Father and

19. See their primary works (Przywara, *Analogia Entis*; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*).

20. *TD* V, 521.

Son encounter each other; thus, together with the Spirit, we simultaneously bear witness and give glory to this love."[21] Finally, Balthasar introduces his theological aesthetics with a description of theology as a "theory of rapture" wherein God draws humankind to participate in His glory. In doing so, Balthasar provides a short manifesto about the very nature of theology, as well as a summary of the Christian message, both of which have *theosis* at their heart:

> In theology, there are no "bare facts" which, in the name of an alleged objectivity of detachment, disinterestedness and impartiality, one could establish like any other worldly facts, without oneself being (both objectively and subjectively) gripped so as to participate in the divine nature (*participatio divinae naturae*). For the object with which we are concerned is man's participation in God which, from God's perspective, is actualized as "revelation" (culminating in Christ's Godmanhood) and which, from man's perspective, is actualized as "faith" (culminating in participation in Christ's Godmanhood). This double and reciprocal *ekstasis*—God's "venturing forth" to man and man's to God—constitutes the very content of dogmatics, which may thus be presented as a theory of rapture: the *admirabile commercium et conubium* between God and man in Christ as Head and Body.[22]

This "wondrous exchange and marriage" between God and humanity, a frequent theme of the Church Fathers, is a phrase that summarizes God's work of redemption and deification, which (as we shall see in Balthasar's soteriology) are inseparable. Balthasar describes "participation in God," which is the core meaning of *theosis*, as the very object of theology. Furthermore, this participation "in the divine nature" is made possible through humanity's union with Christ: truth "grips us" because the truth is Christ himself, who personally embraces and draws us into communion with God. All of this occurs in a mutual relationship of synergy between God and humanity through a reciprocal *ekstasis* which implies a kenosis of self, for the meaning of the word literally means "to move beyond oneself," or "stand outside oneself." This relationship "constitutes the very content of dogmatics" according to Balthasar because it defines the mode of human existence, a reality immersed in the mystery of *theosis* which begins here and now and continues for eternity.

21. *TL* III, 448.

22. *GL* I, 125–26.

The aim of this work will be to draw the various strands of Balthasar's thought on divinization together, presenting the basic outline and major components of his theology as conveyed chiefly in his Christology and trinitarian theology. A comprehensive account of his theology of deification is, however, beyond the more modest scope of this work, which is to explore the preeminent role of kenosis within Balthasar's conception of *theosis*.[23] We will discover that in his theology kenosis epitomizes the character and means of humanity's ultimate union with God. For while fully affirming the patristic emphasis on the centrality of the Incarnation as making divinization possible via Christ's very hypostatic being, Balthasar even more so focuses on the *nature* of his being as the efficacious factor of God's divinizing grace. In his theology God's kenosis comprises the precondition for the Incarnation, the distinguishing characteristic of Christ's life as revealed in his Passion and *descensus ad inferos*, and the mode of humanity's synergy with God. It is particularly in the depths of Christ's kenosis—in his "going to the dead"—that the radical distance of sin's alienation between God and humanity is overcome, and the self-expropriating nature of inner-trinitarian relations is most fully revealed, providing the seedbed of Balthasar's thought regarding the meaning of divinization.

23. Balthasar's theology of deification has complex philosophical underpinnings which will be discussed but not deeply analyzed. Furthermore, it is important to note that Balthasar's integrative theological style, interweaving the arts, metaphysics, literature, et al., thwarts attempts at systematizing his thought. As de Lubac noted in his eulogy to Balthasar: "His work is, as we have said, immense. So varied is it, so complex, usually so undidactic, so wide-ranging through different genres, that its unity is difficult to grasp, at least at first blush. But, strangely enough, once you have got to grips with it, the unity stands out so forcefully that you despair of outlining it without betraying it" (De Lubac, *Church,* 104).

2

Defining *Theosis* and Kenosis

What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?
For You have made him a little lower than the angels,
And You have crowned him with glory and honor.

—PSALM 8:4–5

Before examining Balthasar's contribution to the theology of deification, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of the two most important concepts in our study: *theosis* and kenosis. Regarding the first, *theosis* (θέωσις) is synonymous with both "deification" and "divinization."[1] The concept of deification precedes Christian usage and although the general idea of desiring god-like status dates back from time immemorial, it is first explicitly found in the polytheistic world of the Roman empire in the centuries immediately preceding Christ. In ancient Rome it "was applied particularly to the imperial cult and by extension to the dead generally; in its wider use it implies a 'return to origins,' an ascent of the soul to the place whence it came."[2]

In Holy Scripture, the idea of deification is present in the New Testament even though the term itself is not.[3] Perhaps the most intimate and

1. There are subtle differences between the terms, and likewise many more expressions of deification in the Greek language, as discussed throughout Russell, *Deification.*

2. Russell, *Deification*, 343.

3. As Russell points out, "None of the Greek expressions for deification is used in

striking conception of Christian life and hope as participation in God's very being is found in Second Peter, where the apostle expresses God's promise that believers in Christ may become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). Furthermore, the conviction that "we shall be like Him" expressed in 1 John 3:2 is a powerful witness to this scriptural theme.[4] Christ's high priestly prayer in the gospel of John also intimates the reality of *theosis*, where he reveals that his utmost desire for his followers is eternal, intimate union with God: "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us" (John 17:21). St. Paul, too, prays that the believers of the church in Ephesus may "know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:18–19). In a letter to the church of Corinth he asserts that "we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18). Nevertheless, scriptural references only intimate this reality and are not fleshed out theologically in their contexts, thus they provide only a nascent development of the theme. Norman Russell in *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* rightly maintains that New Testament references expressing participatory union with God—e.g., "with Christ" and "in Christ"—are primarily "images," and not explicit enough to justify any conclusion that St. Paul or the Johannine writings had any specific conception of deification.[5] That being said, it is clear that the biblical authors were expressing a real hope in a concrete reality, as the tradition of the Church has consistently affirmed.[6]

While the basic hope of deification is evident in scripture, it was the Church Fathers who developed its theology and *theosis* gradually became a vital term in their vocabulary.[7] Their understanding of *theosis* as a summary of the whole divine economy began developing as early as the second century and was based on interpretations of Psalm 81:6, "You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High."[8] It was at this time that the vital link between *theosis* and the Incarnation was clarified by St. Irenaeus and "the idea of deification was fully integrated into a theological vision of the

---

the Septuagint or the New Testament" (Russell, *Deification*, 333).

4. In the original Greek, "like" is *homoios* (ὅμοιος).

5. Russell, *Deification*, 11.

6. E.g., Stephen Finlan argues that today "it is *almost* beyond dispute that deification is . . . a major theme in the Pauline literature" (Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theōsis,* 2:21).

7. See, for example, Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poemata dogmatica* 10.5–9 (*PG* 37:465); Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio Catechetica* 25 (*PG* 45:65D).

8. Psalm 81:6 in the LXX. For an overview of the Fathers' exegesis of this text, see Russell, *Fellow Workers*, 55–64.

truth about the human condition."[9] The classic maxim of deification is often attributed to St. Athanasius in the early fourth century: "For he was made man so that we might be made God."[10] Shortly thereafter, the words of Gregory of Nazianzus also became representative of the theme: "He participates in my flesh both to save the image and to make the flesh immortal."[11] Although the western Fathers held the belief that humanity's destiny is to share in the life of God, Russell points out that the theme of deification was never prominent in their theology, and thus never expounded to a degree comparable to the eastern Fathers.[12] Both Tertullian and Hilary of Poitiers used deification terminology to some degree, however, it was not until the late fourth century that the theme was discussed in some detail in the writings of Augustine, who addressed the topic more than any of the other Latin Fathers.[13]

Theosis grew in importance as a way to explicate the full meaning of "salvation" both temporally and eschatologically, thus it is not surprising that the Fathers expressed it in various ways, each emphasizing particular facets of the belief.[14] Greek patristic writings reveal that some describe deification philosophically, speaking of humanity's sharing of divine attributes such as immortality. Others focus primarily on the biblical language of adoption, or the glorification of the body. Still others place a Stoic-like emphasis on human effort, such as cultivating virtue through ascetic practice, as a foundation for becoming more like God.[15] The overarching theme present in all of their writings, however, is that of the believer's real union with God, beginning now and fulfilled in eternity: "*Theosis*, briefly, is the encompassing and

9. Russell, *Fellow Workers*, 25.

10. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 54.3. The Greek word is θεοποιηθῶμεν, which is often translated "divinized."

11. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Festal Orations*, 71.

12. Russell, *Deification*, 321. Jared Ortiz asserts a more equal contribution: "The doctrine of deification is the common patrimony of the Christian East and West, amply and ably received and handed on by both the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Universal Church. Although the vocabulary and emphases vary between and within each tradition, the *res* is the same" (Ortiz, "Deification in the Latin Fathers," 80).

13. Russell, *Deification*, 326–29. For a recent Catholic study on Augustine's theology of deification, see Meconi, *One Christ.*

14. "The church fathers of the late second to fourth centuries (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus) make theōsis a major theme, yet none of them defines the term, or discusses it at sufficient length to clear up ambiguities; they seem to assume that its content is common knowledge in the Christian community" (Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theōsis*, 1:5).

15. All of these emphases are described throughout Russell's exploration of the development of the doctrine in *Deification*. See his "Introduction" for a brief overview.

fulfillment of all times and ages, and of all that exists in either."[16] Patristic sources therefore make it clear that *theosis* refers to both a process and end. It is a verb and a noun, conveying the process of being "deified"—becoming "like God"—and its fulfillment in the afterlife. Furthermore, the concept is not singularly defined (although the Byzantine tradition has more particularly developed its meaning) but is more accurately described as a school of interrelated beliefs concerning humanity's ultimate fulfillment and destiny in and through Christ.

Perhaps the most precise way of defining deification is by characterizing it Christologically—as the extension of Christ's divine-human personhood to humanity through grace. Because the Word is not only "consubstantial with the Father according to the Divinity," but also "consubstantial with us according to the Humanity"[17] through becoming incarnate, it is possible to become like him though grace by participating in his life and Passion (chiefly through the sacraments). According to Gregory of Nazianzus, Christ

> bears the title, "Man" not just with a view to being accessible through his body to corporeal things . . . but with the aim of hallowing Man through himself, by becoming a sort of yeast for the whole lump. He has united with himself all that lay under condemnation, in order to release it from condemnation. For all our sakes he became all that we are, sin apart—body, soul, mind, all that death pervades.[18]

In other words, because Christ became all that we are, we are able to become all that he is—though not by nature, but only through grace.

In the Eastern Tradition

While the basic belief of humanity's participation in God's life and "partaking of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4) is well established in Christian theology, its distinct expression varies significantly among Christian groups today. It is chiefly the Byzantine tradition that has maintained and developed the theology of the patristic era and has for the past millennia been the champion of the theology of *theosis*. As the crown of soteriology in the Orthodox Church it has doctrinal status as affirmed by late medieval Church councils.[19]

16. Russell, *Deification,* 14.

17. From the definition of Christ's two natures of the Council of Chalcedon. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:63.

18. Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ*, 111.

19. "At Constantinopolitan councils held in 1347 and 1351 the Church . . . accepted

Archimandrite George of the Holy Monastery of St. Gregorios on Mount Athos summarizes its all-embracing meaning when he asserts that the very purpose for which God created humanity was "for man to be united with God, not in an external or a sentimental manner but ontologically, in a real way."[20] While western theology has tended to address deification from a primarily eschatologically perspective—as union with God in the world to come—Byzantine theology emphasizes the "this-world" phenomenon of God's grace, focusing on humanity's participation (or "synergy") in the deifying process.[21]

Despite its central place in the theology of the Orthodox Church, however, even such a figure as Georges Florovsky, the famous twentieth-century Russian Orthodox theologian, has acknowledged that deification is not only a "daring" term, but can come across as "pretentious" and even "embarrassing," particularly in the West where it is seldom used.[22] Any reference to humanity's divinization is admittedly provocative and often appears offensive to both Christians and non-Christians alike, for it seems to imply the greatest possible hubris in positing "godlike" status to humanity, denying our creaturely essence. Thus, for those not familiar with its meaning, it always needs to be clarified. Despite the fact that *theosis* "cannot be adequately rendered in any modern language, nor even in Latin," as Florovsky points out, its meaning is "simple and lucid."[23] He provides a helpful introduction to the concept:

> The main characteristic of *theosis* is, according to the Fathers, precisely "immortality" or "incorruption." For God alone "has immortality"—*ho monos echôn athanasian* (1 Tim 6:16). But man now is admitted into an intimate "communion" with God, through Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. And this is much more than just a "moral" communion, and much more than just a human perfection. Only the word *theosis* can render adequately the uniqueness of the promise and offer. *The term theosis is indeed quite embarrassing, if we would think in "ontological" categories.* Indeed, man simply cannot "become" god.

---

the teaching of Gregory Palamas as Orthodox doctrine . . . the hesychast doctrine of deification [is therefore] the Orthodox Church's noblest expression of the content and purpose of the spiritual life" (Russell, *Deification*, 308–9).

20. Archimandrite George, *Theosis,* 22.

21. These general approaches will be discussed throughout our study within the context of Balthasar's interpretations. Recent Catholic studies on the theme are attempting to broaden and reconcile these tendencies, for example, Meconi, *One Christ*.

22. Florovsky, "St. Gregory Palamas," 114–15.

23. Florovsky, "St. Gregory Palamas," 114.

> But the Fathers were thinking in "personal" terms, and the mystery of *personal* communion was involved at this point. *Theosis meant a personal encounter.* It is that intimate intercourse of man with God, in which the whole of human existence is, as it were, permeated by the Divine Presence.[24]

Personal communion with God—on an unimaginable, astonishing level—is thus at the heart of what *theosis* is about. Andrew Louth confirms that this conception of *theosis* is consonant with the patristic tradition, which always integrally unites it to the Incarnation: "Deification expresses the full extent of the consequences of the Incarnation; as in the Incarnation God the Word shared with us in what it is to be human, so in deification we shall come to share in what it is to be God."[25]

It is also essential to add that deification in Byzantine thought is understood as a gift that extends beyond humanity to all creation. This conviction is exemplified particularly in the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor who asserts that "like a new cosmic Adam, [Christ] presents to the Father the totality of the universe restored to unity in Him, by uniting the created to the uncreated."[26] Dimitru Stanilaoe amplifies the meaning of this universal glorification:

> The radiance from Tabor will be extended over the whole world. The world will then be the generalized Tabor. The divine life in Christ's body will fill the whole world. But this will not be the divine essence, but the light and glory that emanate from it as the plenitude of the uncreated energies. Through this the entire creation becomes pneumatic, incorruptible, deified, and transparent. . . . This will give the world an unimaginable beauty.[27]

In the Western Tradition

Despite the importance of the theology of divinization for providing an overarching perspective on the ultimate meaning of human life, and hence guiding the Church's mission and teaching, it has often been a neglected theme in Catholic theology comparatively speaking. The centrality, scope and distinction of the theology of deification that is apparent in the Byzantine tradition has been for the most part unknown, and hence not entirely

24. Florovsky, "St. Gregory Palamas," 115.

25. Louth, "Place of *Theosis*," 34.

26. Maximus the Confessor, "*De ambiguis*" (*PG* 91:1308), quoted in Lossky, *Mystical Theology,* 137.

27. Staniloae, *Experience of God*, 6:151–52.

affirmed, in Catholic theology. Myrra Lot-Borodine, in her seminal study on deification, *La Déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs,* provides a hint as to why this is so in asserting that the theology of Augustine has been determinative in western theology, which purportedly denies the possibility of deification and speaks instead merely of humanity's "beatitude."[28] However, this characterization seems too extreme, as evidenced for example in a recent work on Augustine's theology of deification by David Meconi, who argues that he fundamentally affirms the classic tenets of deification.[29] The theological approach in western thought has also been more philosophically oriented than that of the East: that of explaining how a true union could take place without diminishing God's divinity or conversely, extinguishing man's humanity. In other words, how can there be any real participation between the uncreated and created, the eternal and finite—two utterly different modes of being? Since God is completely "other" and so by definition inconceivable, the logical question is whether or not it is even possible to know God through manifestations of the divine in creation.

Given the traditional reticence of Catholic theology to affirm the concept of deification in a similarly comprehensive way as the eastern tradition, it is not surprising that it is often referred to diminutively within the context of other theological themes relating to humanity's participation in God's grace. To provide one example, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* has no article on deification, divinization, or *theosis*.[30] Instead, it briefly addresses the issue of union with God through other subjects such as "Supernatural Adoption," "Divine Indwelling," and "Friendship with God." Frequently, if deification is referred to in Catholic encyclopedias or dogmatic textbooks, it is addressed within the context of the doctrine of "participation" or "sanctifying grace."[31] Therefore, while the subject of deification has a definitive place in Catholicism, it often comes across as a small and rather awkward one, despite a recent resurgence of interest.[32]

28. Lot-Borodine, *La Déification*, esp. 39–40.

29. While Meconi has more thoroughly engaged Augustine's theology on this issue than Lot-Borodine in *The One Christ*, opinions are still divided on this issue.

30. Cf. 1967 edition.

31. For example, the entry for "Deification" in *The New Dictionary of Theology* simply directs the reader to "see Grace." Likewise, in Ott's *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, the subject of deification is briefly mentioned only under the heading of "sanctifying grace."

32. As Andrew Louth asserts: "For whatever reasons . . . [it] ceased to have a central role in Western theology from about the twelfth century, though it had a continuing place among the mystics. . . . It is no longer part of the pattern of either contemporary Catholic or Protestant theology" (Louth, "Place of *Theosis*," 33). One noteworthy

Part of the reason for this is the fact that there has been little rapprochement between the East and the West on the theology of deification, and consequently the primacy of place the doctrine receives in the East and its long history of usage there often overshadows theological discussions on the theme. The central terms themselves—*theosis*, "deification," and "divinization"—are loaded with a constellation of beliefs that some argue are not consonant with traditional Catholic teaching on the subject. Furthermore, the theme of deification is often displaced in Catholic theology by the far more popular concept of the "beatific vision" which is the preferred encapsulation of the belief of humanity's participation in the life of the Trinity.[33] As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: "the beatific vision, in which God opens himself in an inexhaustible way to the elect, will be the ever-flowing well-spring of happiness, peace, and mutual communion."[34] If conceived narrowly, the doctrine of the "beatific vision" can eclipse the fuller sense of "deification." This helps to explain why more specific teachings on the topic are often considered mere *theologoumena*, a category Balthasar himself refers to when discussing various theologies that treat of humanity's participation in the life of God.[35]

Thus, it is essential to differentiate between deification in its broad sense—which is doctrinal truth for Catholics—and specific facets of the theology that are highly debated. That the blessed will one day experience union with God is, and has always been, richly expressed in Catholic liturgy and theology. The most significant source is the Roman Rite itself, which includes the eucharistic prayer "*Per huius aquae et vini mysterium eius efficiamur divinitatis consortes, qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est particeps*" ("By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity").[36] Moreover, St. Augustine unambiguously followed the fundamental teaching espoused by Irenaeus (and expressed by his contemporary, Cyril of Alexandria), that "the deification of human beings is the purpose for which the Word became incarnate and is appropriated by them through baptism."[37] His understanding of deification was rooted in the concept of "participation in the divine" which he considered the "heart of redemption," yet he

example to the contrary is a lengthy article on "Divinisation" in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, 3:1370–1459.

33. Cf. *ST* I-II.3.2, 4, 7; supp. q. 92.

34. *CCC* §1045.

35. *TD* V, 428.

36. *Daily Roman Missal*, 688.

37. Russell, *Deification*, 331.

rejected any notions of becoming "equal with God" which led him to maintain an apophatic attitude, stressing that it should be "understood in divine silence."[38] Likewise, in speaking about the restoration of the human race through Christ's incarnation, Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* says that "full participation of the Divinity . . . is the true bliss of man and end of human life; and this is bestowed upon us by Christ's humanity; for Augustine says in a sermon (xiii *de Temp*.): 'God was made man, that man might be made God.'"[39]

Other primary Catholic sources include the *Catechism*, which solidly confirms the basic patristic teaching regarding deification:

> The Word became flesh to make us "partakers of the divine nature": "For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God." "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." "The only–begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods."[40]

The Catechism here quotes Saints Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Aquinas, respectively; a powerful triad representing the voice of the Church down through the centuries.[41] Countless more examples could be canvassed, but needless to say it is abundantly clear that this broad sense of *theosis* is the consistent teaching of the Church, both in the East and West. Therefore, Daniel Keating has good reason to assert that

> No one denies that the Byzantine tradition in the East has maintained and developed the patristic legacy, resulting in what we call today the Eastern doctrine of *theosis.* . . . To rediscover the doctrine of deification, the West need not look only to the Greek Fathers (which is essential); a key part of the rediscovery is recognizing that a rich account of human deification in Christ is also present in the Western Fathers and Aquinas.[42]

38. Russell, *Deification*, 332.

39. *ST* III.1.2.

40. *CCC* §460.

41. The teaching of deification is also evident in the section of the Catechism on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity: "The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity. But even now we are called to be a dwelling for the Most Holy Trinity" (§260). Also, under "justification": "By the participation of the Spirit, we become communicants in the divine nature . . . For this reason, those in whom the Spirit dwells are divinized'" (§1988).

42. Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 119.

Modern scholarship on the theology of deification has recently moved beyond traditional Byzantine and Latin contexts to also incorporate Protestant interpretations of the theme. While the ancient traditions regard *theosis* as integral to understanding what "salvation" means, Protestant theology has often had an ambivalent or even negative view of the concept, traditionally focusing on redemption from sin as the quintessential theme of salvific history. This is a common observance, as noted by the Protestant theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen: "As is well known, Reformation theology has had a hard time in trying to reconcile the idea of theosis with the doctrine of justification. Historically, these two traditions have been considered to be diametrically opposed to each other."[43] Regarding the basic prospect of immortality (which comprises the fundamental meaning of *theosis*), Balthasar affirms its rightful place in Christian theology while noting that Protestant theologies often regard it "as a titanism of sinful man that takes hold of God's eternal decision and usurps what only God can give: eternal life, whereas resurrection can be granted to him only out of pure grace."[44] In some ways modern Protestant theology on the theme has therefore created some confusion, particularly in that classic terminology is unavoidably used loosely and ambiguously to redefine its meaning, creating competing terminologies and *theosis* "doctrines."[45]

That being said, new developments have also provided unique insights, for example in providing a much needed stretching of the bounds of "justification" as the primary soteriological framework of Protestant theology.[46] As Andrew Louth explains, the patristic tradition emphasizes that "deification is the fulfillment of creation, not just the rectification of the Fall."[47] Common conceptions of "justification" can only be characterized as a first step towards understanding the cosmic ramifications of Christ's

43. Kärkkäinen, "Ecumenical Potential," 45. This topic will be discussed again in the chapter on "Synergy."

44. *EXP* IV, 462.

45. For a helpful overview of some contemporary theologies of deification, see Hallonsten, "*Theosis* in Recent Research," 281–93.

46. For example, the work of the "Finnish school" is attempting to highlight aspects of Martin Luther's theology of justification that incorporate the theme of deification. See Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ.*

47. Louth, "Place of *Theosis*," 34–35. Yves Congar elaborates the same point: "The West sometimes seems to regard the incarnation predominantly as a means of making good a deficiency, a divine substitution making the pardon of man possible as well as the recovery of the lost gift of grace and the resumption of friendship with God. The East sees in it a re-creation and re-spiritualization of human nature from within, the recapitulation of all things in Christ in which they retrieve their true nature" (Congar, *Dialogue between Christians*, 221).

redemptive victory. Catholic theology can likewise too often focus on the "satisfaction" of Christ's sacrifice as the heart of the meaning of "redemption," which in turn can become, for all intents and purposes, a synonym for "salvation."[48] Redemption models effectively describe the salvific work of Christ and explain what we are saved *from*—namely, sin and death—but they often fail to fully address the question, what are we saved *for*? Dumitru Staniloae provides a helpful summary of what the term "salvation" should encompass:

> It includes the idea of "life," "eternal life," and "the Spirit" who together with the multitude of his gifts is given to those who believe. It also includes what is expressed by the words "union with Christ," "life in Christ" . . . "fellowship with the Father and his Son," . . . the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit," . . . the condition of "righteousness," "holiness," "divine sonship," . . ."participation in the divine nature," . . . rebirth in the Spirit, and an "inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading."[49]

The theology of deification focuses on both the purpose and *fruits* of Christ's redemption, thus rightly placing salvation in not only an existential, but an eschatological and indeed cosmic context. This is essential, for salvation is far more than just something "accomplished": it is *being* accomplished and will be *fully* accomplished only at the resurrection of the dead, when all creation will be recapitulated in Christ.[50]

The most thorough and dependable recent Catholic scholarly study of deification is Norman Russell's *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek*

48. To provide one example, in *The New Dictionary of Theology* when one looks up the term "salvation" there is no entry but merely a note directing one to "see *Redemption*." One reason for this tendency to focus on the theme of "redemption" has to do with an historic shift of thought that took place at the end of the Romanesque period. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger highlights the common observation that the "relationship of the spiritual and material" changed with the advent of the Gothic, and hence "man's attitude to reality." With this development the "central image" in the West became different: "The depiction is no longer of the *Pantocrator*, the Lord of all, leading us into the eighth day. It has been superseded by the image of the crucified Lord in the agony of his passion and death. . . . A devotion to the Cross of a more historicizing kind replaces orientation to the *Oriens*, to the risen Lord who has gone ahead of us" (Ratzinger, *Spirit of the Liturgy,* 124–28).

49. Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 182–83.

50. Keating highlights this point: "Deification ensures that our understanding of 'sanctification' does not stop short at cleansing and purification from sin; that sanctification has as its end and goal communion with God himself brought about by his direct agency" (Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 123).

Patristic Tradition.[51] He provides a helpful overview of the development of the concept politically (in the cult of the Roman emperor), philosophically, and theologically. He also delineates the various schools of thought, from the earliest Christian models of *theosis* to those of the Alexandrian, Cappadocian and monastic traditions.[52] In describing the various ways the Greek Fathers conceived *theosis*, Russell delineates key facets of the theme, attempting to distinguish their specific use during the first centuries of the Church. Most importantly, he asserts that "the early Fathers use deification language in one of three ways, nominally, analogically, or metaphorically."[53] While he describes the first two uses as "straightforward," the metaphorical use is "more complex . . . characteristic of two distinct approaches, the ethical and the realistic."[54] Regarding these latter two, the ethical approach "takes deification to be the attainment of likeness to God through ascetic and philosophical endeavour," while the realistic approach "assumes that human beings are in some sense transformed by deification."[55] Finally, he subdivides the realistic approach into two aspects, the "ontological" and "dynamic"; the first concerned "with human nature's transformation in principle by the Incarnation," and the latter "with the individual's appropriation of this deified humanity through the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist."[56] If one adopts Russell's categorization of the patristic language of deification, Balthasar's treatment of the theme of deification is clearly realistic in a broad sense, promoting a model of participation in God that is both ontological and dynamic. It is this "realistic approach"—i.e., conceiving deification as the *actual* transformation of the human person through God's grace—that is at the heart of traditional Christian teaching on the subject and hence the primary focus of our study.

51. One of the most complete bibliographies on recent works in the area is provided by Vladimir Kharlamov in vol. 2 of Finlan, *Theōsis*.

52. In highlighting specific notions regarding deification that the Church Fathers held, Russell sometimes focuses more on their differences than their points of similarity and harmony, implying that a common understanding of deification did not exist in the early Church. Russell's underlying presupposition is that the concept of deification developed in stages, appearing only gradually over time: "The subject of this book is Christian deification from its birth as a metaphor to its maturity as a spiritual doctrine" (Russell, *Deification*, 1).

53. Russell, *Deification*, 1.

54. Russell, *Deification*, 1.

55. Russell, *Deification*, 2.

56. Russell, *Deification*, 2–3.

Non-Christian Conceptions of Deification

In order to both avoid misunderstanding and more effectively highlight the distinction of Balthasar's contribution to the topic, it is necessary to differentiate the Christian meaning of divinization from popular non-Christian conceptions of the idea. The desire for divinity is a theme that in many ways encapsulates humanity's existential predicament, thus it is no surprise that numerous concepts of *theosis* are represented in the flood of New Age and self-help books which fill the shelves of bookstores. Many of these assert the belief that we can be "masters of our fate," with god-like control over our lives—our health, possessions, relationships, and ultimately even our death. It is nevertheless obvious to the more sober-minded that we do not have this kind of power. Rampant egoism of this kind often expresses a destructive conception of deification, exemplified in Darwinian views that advocate a "survival of the fittest" mentality, and perhaps most notably in Friedrich Nietzsche's ideology of the "will to power." Henri de Lubac describes his philosophy as a "war against the Christian ideal . . . against the doctrine which makes beatitude and salvation the aim of life, against the supremacy of the poor in spirit, the pure in heart, the suffering, the failures."[57] This is because Nietzsche sought to establish a pagan ideal of self-deification where truth is abolished and no God is acknowledged, but only the superiority of the übermensch ("superman"): "God will find himself again in man, beyond good and evil."[58]

Less dramatic, though equally detrimental forms of deification in the modern world are those which, in glorifying man, usurp God by claiming the gifts of God's grace as personal achievement, taking pride in self-will. The classic example in American society is the Mormon belief that "As man now is, God once was; As God now is, man may be."[59] If this were referring to Christ (i.e., that God was made incarnate in Jesus), the statement would be orthodox Christian truth, however, it refers to the *Father*: "God the Eternal Father was once a mortal man who passed through a school of earth life similar to that through which we are now passing."[60] The above modern examples represent a widespread belief that becoming "gods" is possible

57. De Lubac, *Drama of Atheist Humanism*, 63.

58. De Lubac, *Drama of Atheist Humanism*, 26.

59. This statement, made by Lorenzo Snow, the fifth president of that Church, reflects the teachings of Joseph Smith and is considered authoritative in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

60. Hunter, *Gospel Through the Ages*, 104. Joseph Smith taught that "God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did" (Smith, *Prophet Joseph Smith,* 346).

through human ingenuity and effort alone. Thus, they inevitably reveal a greater concern for glorifying the human spirit than the God of grace. Both creaturely humility and a fitting recognition of God's utter transcendence are sorely lacking in these existential views. Against egotistical forms of apotheosis, which promote a Promethean mindset, we will see that Balthasar's theology focuses on the inherently kenotic core of *theosis*: namely, that "becoming God" fundamentally involves recognizing one's creaturely status in light of the divine and looking to Christ as both exemplar and Saviour.

In his essay "In Retrospect," Balthasar reflects on the popular trend of religious philosophers and theologians "supernaturalizing what is worldly" in a multiplicity of theologies that often convey a false sense of deification.[61] He contemplates whether or not some of the great intellectual impulses of modern times regarding the "religious element of mankind" could be drawn into harmony with the Christian faith. In doing so, Balthasar provides the example of creating a hybrid evolutionary version of deification:

> The cosmos, biologically considered, is in evolution up to man and beyond him; at the critical moment, the Incarnation of God immerses itself in the world process as its supernatural motive force and brings it to the final maturity of *theosis*, which the Greek Fathers already saw as the Omega point; this is to make a home for Darwin, the valid ideas of the monists and Nietzsche's idea and ethics of the superman.[62]

After providing this and other examples of "inclusive" possibilities for theological thought, through the merging of natural knowledge of God with divine revelation, Balthasar hypothetically asks, "It rescues us, does it not, from the narrow ecclesiasticism that has become incomprehensible in its positive legalism, and reestablishes our solidarity with all men"?[63] But of course he utterly rejects this path as the "broad way," despite the fact that it has achieved so much outward success in modern times. And his reason is clear: if all these truths are good, all are "anonymous Christians," and all paths lead to salvation, then "it is hard to see why a person should still be a name-bearing Christian."[64]

The remainder of our study will reveal how Balthasar's theology of deification confronts humanity's tendency toward Prometheanism and promotes the way of kenotic love revealed pre-eminently in Christ's incarnation

61. Balthasar, *My Work,* 47–91.
62. Balthasar, *My Work,* 53–54.
63. Balthasar, *My Work,* 55.
64. Balthasar, *My Work,* 56.

and passion. It is only through Christ that humanity can discover what "becoming God" means, and how it is possible. For in his kenosis Christ not only reveals God's fundamental nature as love but becomes the way to humanity's *theosis*.

Kenosis

The term "kenosis" is derived from the Greek verb κενόω ("to make empty"), whose meaning is at the heart of the Christ-hymn of the second chapter of Philippians, where the apostle Paul encourages the community of Philippi to imitate Jesus Christ, who "emptied himself" (ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν), taking the form of a servant (Phil 2:5–11). It conveys the mystery of Christ pouring himself out in love, making himself powerless, for the sake of humanity.[65] The weight of tradition has interpreted this passage as describing Christ's "emptying" himself of his divine glory for the purpose of redeeming humanity through his incarnation.[66] The hymn thus reveals the solution to humanity's longing to "be like God" by revealing the nature of God's loving character, the bleakness of the human predicament, and the way of salvation provided in the very person of Christ. Salvation, and hence ultimately deification, is thus integrally tied to self-giving love, not self-assertive moral superiority or the acquiring of knowledge.[67] Therefore it is not surprising that in the Church's first centuries the Christ-hymn was important in refuting Gnostic, Docetic, Nestorian and Arian heresies, which tend to over-emphasize human effort in the salvific process. St. Athanasius, for instance, cites it in countering Arius, demonstrating that the movement of Jesus Christ was a descent, not an ascent: "What could be clearer or more probative than these words? He did not pass from a more wretched state to a better one, but, being God, took the form of a slave and, by that act of assuming, was not lifted up but cast himself down."[68]

65. Cf. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 210–12.

66. Some modern scholarship, however, interprets this passage as comparing Jesus, the second Adam, with the first Adam, who sought through his pride to "grasp" equality with God.

67. Salvation is defined by a very different form of power, as Gregory of Nyssa describes: "Descent to man's lowly position is a supreme example of power—of a power which is not bounded by circumstances contrary to its nature. . . . God's transcendent power is not so much displayed in the vastness of the heavens, or the luster of the stars, or the orderly arrangement of the universe or his perpetual oversight of it, as in his condescension to our weak nature" (Gregory of Nyssa, "Address on Religious Instruction," 300–301).

68. Athanasius quoted in *MP*, 25.

While this chapter of Philippians is the only place the Greek verb is used in this sense, the theme of kenosis is found throughout the New Testament, particularly in 2 Corinthians 8:9 where Paul states: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."[69] It is the intrinsic link between poorness and richness, weakness and power that epitomizes the nature of Christian truth, and is also the chief paradigm in Balthasar's theology for describing the way God deifies humanity and all of creation.

There is no modern Catholic theologian—or arguably any theologian of any Christian era—who has highlighted the significance of Christ's kenosis more than Balthasar.[70] While this kind of single-minded emphasis on God's kenosis in Christ may seem extreme, in reality it follows a long line of traditional thought. For example, as John McGuckin notes, for Cyril of Alexandria "the notion of the Eternal One's self-emptying (Kenosis) as outlined in Phil 2:6f rises to the status of a master theme throughout his thought—to such an extent that the earthly economy of the Word made flesh is often simply referred to as the Kenosis."[71] Furthermore, in describing how St. Augustine's understanding of faith developed over time, Avery Dulles highlights that it moved from centering first on the need for purification through asceticism, then on learning humility through obedience, and finally on charity through realizing the kenosis of God.[72] The prominence given to this theme by various theologians provides the concept of "salvation" with a fullness of meaning impossible to convey in any other way as noted by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, who asserts that "the prime commitment of theology is seen to be the understanding of God's kenosis, a grand and mysterious truth for the human mind, which finds it inconceivable that suffering and death can express a love which gives itself and seeks nothing in return."[73]

69. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:661. The contributor, Albrecht Oepke, states: "What is meant is that the heavenly Christ did not selfishly exploit His divine form and mode of being . . . but by His own decision emptied Himself of it or laid it by, taking the form of a servant by becoming man."

70. The other modern theologian frequently referred to who rivals Balthasar in his emphasis on this theme is Sergius Bulgakov, the twentieth-century Russian Orthodox theologian, whose work is frequently cited in Balthasar's writings.

71. McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria*, 189.

72. Dulles, *Assurance of Things Hoped For,* 25. Also of note is the theology of St. Hilary of Poitiers, who "describes the kenosis of Christ with such strong words that some have asked whether he did not assume that the divine nature disappeared" (Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 308).

73. John Paul II, "Fides et Ratio" 93.

Along these lines, St. Gregory of Nazianzus eloquently expresses the two intimately related themes of kenosis and *theosis* in a rhapsody about the Incarnation:

> The one who enriches becomes poor; he is made poor in my flesh, that I might be enriched through his divinity. The full one empties himself; for he empties himself of his own glory for a short time, that I may participate in his fullness. What is the wealth of his goodness? What is this mystery concerning me? I participated in the [divine] image, and I did not keep it; he participates in my flesh both to save the image and to make the flesh immortal.[74]

It is God's kenosis that makes man's *theosis* possible. *How* this occurs, however—in what manner and by what means—is the primary question our study seeks to more fully address. Through the Son's kenosis humanity is drawn into his self-giving obedience in an ongoing, relational process. Balthasar's theology of deification moves beyond traditional avenues of thought on the subject to provide rich insights via highlighting the manifold, personal—indeed, trinitarian—way that God graces his creation with new and abundant life.

Differentiating Other Theologies of Kenosis

Having outlined the basic theological content of "kenosis," it is necessary to clarify what the term does *not* imply in Balthasar's theology. Firstly, it is not about glorifying the tragic. As Balthasar discusses in *A Theological Anthropology*, the glorification of human suffering is a common theme of human civilization, found in pre-Socratic philosophies, Greek dramas, Germanic sagas, the philosophy of Nietzsche, etc. where "the situation of a struggle and breakthrough is taken as the primary condition of man," imbuing it with a sense of grandeur.[75] Balthasar warns that any theology that emphasizes the redemptive efficacy of Christ's passion and death needs to avoid the slide into viewing suffering as the path to salvation in and of itself.

74. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Festal Orations*, 71. Vladimir Lossky also helpfully summarizes Greek patristic thought on this dynamic connection: "The descent (*katabasis*) of the divine person of Christ makes human persons capable of an ascent (*anabasis*) in the Holy Spirit. It was necessary that the voluntary humiliation, the redemptive self-emptying (*kenosis*) of the Son of God should take place, so that fallen men might accomplish their vocation of *theosis*, the deification of created beings by uncreated grace" (Lossky, *Image and Likeness,* 97).

75. *TA*, 58.

Secondly, "kenosis" in our current study has nothing to do with popular kenotic religious philosophies such as that of Gianni Vattimo, who views reason itself as something negative (i.e., as authoritarian) and hence maintains that it should be dissolved to make room for faith.[76] For Vattimo the kenosis of God is all about the weakening and dismantling of metaphysical hermeneutics, which ultimately results in a denial of the very essence of the Christian message. He also rejects the sacrificial aspect of Jesus' redemption, insisting rather that Jesus' goal in the Incarnation was to desacralize religion by exposing its tendency to authoritarianism and violence through demanding sacrifice. This kind of philosophy (and others like it) is antithetical to the thrust of Balthasar's theology, which not only focuses on Christ's passion and death as the ultimate metaphysical act of uniting the human and divine, but affirms the sacred, life-giving character of the Church as the means of deification.

Perhaps most importantly, "kenosis" in our study needs to be distinguished from modern Christological kenotic theories concerning the relationship between Christ's divine and human nature. It is a truism, as Edward Oakes acknowledges, that "any version of the Incarnation—the doctrine that somehow or another (meaning, however conceived) the infinite God *became* (meaning, *was transformed into*) a finite human being—requires by definition a correlative doctrine of kenosis (self-emptying) in order to be coherent . . . without some notion along the lines of kenosis we are left with sheer paradox."[77] This however raises the question: what kind of "doctrine of kenosis" best conveys the fullness of Christian truth? The Christological theory of kenosis (aka "kenotic Christology," or "kenoticism") fails to fulfill the task. That theory, which began in nineteenth-century Europe, is a recent attempt to reconcile aspects of the Chalcedonian dogma regarding the two natures of Christ by stressing the distinctly human nature of Christ.[78] Thus, it grapples with issues such as Jesus' capacity to be tempted and his foreknowledge. Theologians of that school assert in varying degrees that "the divine Word relinquished some or all of His divinity in becoming man: that He surrendered His omnipotence, His divine omniscience, His omnipresence; that he lost consciousness of His divinity; or even that he ceased to be

76. See Vattimo, *After Christianity*.

77. Oakes, "'He Descended into Hell,'" 218.

78. For example, Friedrich Loofs asserts that "no theologian of any standing in the early Church ever adopted such a theory of *kenosis* of the Logos as would involve an actual supersession of His divine form of existence by the human—a real '*becoming*-man,' i.e., a transformation on the part of the Logos" (Loofs, "Kenosis," 683a; cf. Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 3:8, s.v. "Kenosis").

God from the moment of the Incarnation until the Resurrection."[79] In other words, Christ divested himself of divine attributes in the Incarnation, and thus underwent a kind of ontological change of being.

These assertions are controversial and have been frequently refuted.[80] The primary—and most unassailable—critique of this theory involves the conviction that God's nature is immutable, which entails that any self-emptying of the incarnate Word to this kind of extreme is metaphysically impossible without denying the divinity of Christ.[81] Regarding this tenet of faith, Balthasar affirms that in the Incarnation "God does not thereby degenerate from what he is; rather, he exercises 'his free, original possibility' to become what has sprung creatively from him (for which reason Scripture speaks of love)."[82] Furthermore, any bifurcation of Christ, a separation of the two natures, is unacceptable as Balthasar clearly indicates:

> We must, according to biblical revelation, avoid splitting the Son of God, as he exists in his mission, into one who fulfills his mandate on earth and one who meanwhile abides unchanged in heaven and observes the one who is sent. The one sent is one single unity who abides in time as eternal one. His allowing himself to be disposed of from the form of God into the "form of a slave" and "human likeness" (Phil 2:6) is an event which involves him as the eternal Son.[83]

Having attempted to bring more definitiveness to the terms *theosis* and kenosis as they will be used in our study, it is now time to consider the basic framework from which Balthasar constructs his theology of deification.

79. Catholic University of America, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 8:154, s.v. "Kenosis."

80. See particularly the well-known critique in *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément* (Henry, "Kénose," 7–161).

81. For a more constructive modern approach to kenotic theory that explores ways of moving beyond some of its obvious pitfalls, see Coakley, "Does Kenosis Rest on a Mistake?," 246–64.

82. *TL* II, 284. Balthasar is here following the thought of Karl Rahner.

83. Kehl and Löser, *Von Balthasar Reader*, 135. In his *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar expands this important point: "The event by which [the eternal Son] consents to be transferred from the form of God into the 'form of a servant' and the 'likeness of men' affects him as the eternal Son. . . . We can call it *kenōsis*, as in Philippians 2, but this does not imply any mythological alteration in God; it *can* express one of the infinite possibilities available to free, eternal life: namely, that the Son, who has everything from the Father, 'lays up' and commits to God's keeping the 'form of God' he has received from him" (*TD* III, 228).

3

Balthasar's Approach and Method

Mystery does not begin at the point where reason, having taken many rational steps, does not know how to proceed: mystery begins right in the middle of the Prologue.[1]

In Church tradition the kenosis described in Philippians 2 is about Christ emptying himself not of his divinity, but of his divine *glory* (δόξα). In the Incarnation Christ limited himself, restrained (or "hid") his divine glory for the sake of saving humanity through his Passion and Resurrection, Balthasar explains. Therefore, rather than focusing on any speculative "loss" of Jesus' divine attributes when discussing God's kenosis, Balthasar directs his energy towards investigating what is conveyed through the Incarnation about the kind of nature God has and how He reveals that nature. Balthasar's theology as a whole frequently turns to the theme of God's kenosis as characterizing the mode and quality of God's relationship with humanity. This theme is woven into many aspects of his work, and characterizes his understanding of not only God's *oikonomia*, but also the immanent Trinity. For example, along with his frequent use of the term "kenosis," in the second volume of his *Theo-Logic* Balthasar makes prolific use of the term "*selbstentäußerung*," which is usually translated as "self-expropriation." The word *"hingabe"* is also recurrent in his trilogy, which connotes self-gift, surrender, or abandonment.

1. *TD* V, 493.

Since divine love is revealed in kenosis, what implications does this have for describing the fullness of *human* love—a primary goal of *theosis*—given that we are created to participate in the divine image? Josef Pieper insightfully speaks of perfection in *caritas* as requiring a transformation of *eros* "which perhaps resembles passing through something akin to dying. . . . *Caritas*, in renewing and rejuvenating us, also brings us death in a certain sense: *facit in nobis quamdam mortem,* says Augustine."[2] It is this kenotic transformation of the human person, "akin to dying" that characterizes love in Balthasar's theology, and hence for him defines the nature of *theosis*. Particularly in Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday, the fullness of divine love is not merely "akin" to dying but is manifested supremely in Christ's actual "going to the dead." It is this most radical kenosis that for Balthasar is a foundation of theology: he describes his theological agenda as the "prayerful translation of dogma into life through meditation on the poor love of God."[3] For Christ's kenosis not only supremely manifests God's loving nature, but reveals the way of *theosis* and makes it possible. One could thus say that the theme of kenosis in theology is about a "fall" that reverses the Fall—an emptying of the self for the sake of love that leads to not only redemption from sin and death, but the restoration of paradise.

Consequently, the two themes of kenosis and *theosis* when integrated reveal the rhythm of human life—indeed the very shape of humanity itself, which is Christ himself. Balthasar comments on the paradoxical reality of humanity's "lowliness and exaltation" as the *imago Dei* which is the basic premise of his theology of deification:

> The figure formed from clay receives a crown which it does not apparently deserve . . . [thus] the crux of the matter here is the incomprehensible oscillation between lowliness and exaltation, between God's glory, proper to God alone, and the reflected splendour of the glory that emanates from God and enfolds man, without the human form ever being able to contain this splendour within itself.[4]

This "oscillation" between the hope of deification and humble creatureliness embodies humanity's deepest desires and worst fears, for every person's life engages the mysteries of both glory and nothingness in some way. As Balthasar observes, humanity has the "mission to rule over the world," yet "must now perform the painful duties of a servant."[5] This dichotomy in

2. Pieper, *Josef Pieper*, 50.
3. Albus, "Spirit and Fire," 586.
4. *GL* VI, 94.
5. *GL* VI, 101–2.

human life can be ultimately understood only through Christ who provides not only the perfect model of existence, but the means to attain it.

Three Characteristics of Balthasar's Theology of Deification

Balthasar's works reveal an inclination and skill for gathering diverse strands of the Christian tradition, highlighting similarities and differences, and reconciling them into a cohesive whole. It may seem surprising, therefore, that he never systematically developed a theology of deification. Nevertheless, this fact becomes more understandable when one considers the breadth and depth of the theme which is embedded in all aspects of the Church's theology, and embraces matters that inescapably surpass the intellect. Despite Balthasar's lack of a systematic approach, however, there are places in his work where deification comes closer to the forefront of his thought: chiefly, his article "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," his book *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, and the final volume of his *Theo-Drama,* entitled *The Last Act*. These works reveal some important underlying convictions which establish the basic foundation for his theology of deification.

For one, Balthasar's conception of deification is rooted in soteriology; hence the union between God and humanity is always expressed Christologically. More specifically, his soteriology reveals the vital connection between Christology and anthropology, for it is the kenosis of Christ that defines humanity's *theosis*. In volume four of his *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar structures his theological work in this area based on his conviction that "the quintessence of Scripture is found in five motifs":

> (1) The Son gives himself, through God the Father, for the world's salvation. (2) The Sinless One "changes places" with sinners. While, in principle, the Church Fathers understand this in a radical sense, it is only in the modern variations of the theories of representation that the consequences are fully drawn out. (3) Man is thus set free (ransomed, redeemed, released). (4) More than this, however, he is initiated into the divine life of the Trinity. (5) Consequently, the whole process is shown to be the result of an initiative on the part of divine love.[6]

For our purposes it is most important to point out the intrinsic connection between the third and fourth motifs, which are at the heart of our

6. *TD* IV, 317.

study. In discussing humanity's "life in God," and the freedom that entails, Balthasar insists that the themes of redemption and deification are inseparable. This is an essential point that will be returned to repeatedly since it is the foundation for Balthasar's understanding of the relationship between kenosis and *theosis*. As he asserts, liberation from sin and death, "that is, everything we mean by 'ransom,' 'redemption,' 'liberation,' from the powers of sin, of the world, of death, of the demonic," is integrally connected to "liberated man's initiation into the trinitarian life of God, described by the Greek Fathers . . . as *theosis*. Man's freedom, hitherto enslaved, is liberated 'from' something and liberated 'for' something."[7] Thus, Christ's redemptive work cannot be understood apart from its goal of deification, and likewise deification cannot be understood apart from Christ's Passion, death and resurrection. While the Church Fathers primarily emphasized the Incarnation as the catalyst of deification and the key to comprehending its reality, Balthasar expands the boundaries of this conviction to stress the role of Christ's Passion—and particularly how it conveys God's kenotic love—as that which most fully defines the meaning and character of *theosis*.

Along these lines, another key characteristic of Balthasar's theology of deification is that it always gives primacy to the movement of descent rather than ascent. A helpful introduction to his kenotic understanding of God's grace can be found in his short essay entitled "Characteristics of Christianity,"[8] where he makes a clear distinction between "human thought, philosophical or religious, [which] starts out from man, ascends with him and operates on his scale," and Christian faith, which is about the descent of grace: "not our movement toward God, but God's movement to us. It is heaven projected into our world. It is a participation in the divine nature, essentially as sanctifying grace, consciously as faith, hope and charity. The natural man is man seeking God, grace is God who has found man."[9]As Balthasar moves on to further describe the descending movement of grace, he demarcates the essential relationship between kenosis and *theosis* by focusing the divine/human relationship in Christ, who is grace incarnate, the gift of God himself:

> For in Christ, God and man, God has opened himself to the world, and in this movement of descent has determined the course of every mode of ascent of man to him. Christ is the one and only criterion, given in the concrete, by which we measure the relations between God and man, grace and nature, faith and

7. *TD* IV, 367.
8. *WR*, 23–48.
9. *WR*, 24.

> reason; and Christ is, though he has a human nature, a divine Person.[10]

Balthasar is very clear here, as he is throughout his writings on the theme: it is Christ's kenosis that has "determined" the course of humanity's *theosis*. Elsewhere (as we will discuss later) he speaks of Christ as the concrete *analogia entis*, who in his very person constitutes the union between God and humanity. Thus, for Balthasar all discussions of deification must find their bearings in God's "movement of descent" in the Son of Man. This, we will examine, is a strict "law" regarding not only Balthasar's understanding of deification, but the way he conceives the very heart of the gospel.

Furthermore, unlike the Byzantine tradition, Balthasar refrains from characterizing *theosis* as the crown of theology, or as the primary rationale for the Incarnation.[11] Instead of focusing on the ultimate glory of humanity or creation as the purpose of God's *oikonomia*, Balthasar simply emphasizes that "the final goal of creation [is] the *gloria Dei.*"[12] This is made clear in *The Glory of the Lord*, when, in laying out his method of inquiry concerning the relation between theology and metaphysics, he makes an important statement about the ultimate meaning of revelation that not only conveys his basic orientation concerning the place of deification in his theology, but the underlying rationale of his entire theological program:

> The heart of the revelation of God in Christ can be seen only by one who neither takes the cosmos as the *final* meaning of revelation (as classical philosophy and Christian theology until the Renaissance often, though not consistently, inclined to do) nor takes man as the final meaning (as the modern period prefers to do); for man is completed, redeemed and made blessed by the revelation; the final meaning must be left "disinterestedly" to the love of God as this shows itself in its devotion and self-emptying. Such a man "gives the glory" for this love to God alone and understands himself and the world as a function of this love. It is not difficult to grasp that this refusal to see God's love for man and world solely in terms of its purpose is the highest ethical-religious and aesthetic act of man, not as a "meritorious undertaking," but as the obedient reply to the love of God as it opens itself before him and to him. Only so will the old principle (which cannot be made obsolete) that God could have no other end in the creation of the world than the proclamation

10. *WR*, 25.
11. Cf. *TD* IV, 382.
12. *TD* V, 507.

> of his own "glory" become once again living and telling. Everything else that can be said about world and man, every "finality" and "evolution" of the individual, the society and the cosmos as a whole on all its levels—from the level of life to the religious level—must take second place, in a subordinate position to this first principle, if it is to be understood as, in the *last* analysis, meaningful.[13]

The purpose of God's self-revelation is, most simply, the expression of His love. For Balthasar, the final meaning of revelation rests in this reality itself, not in its purpose—even if that purpose is the miracle of the glorification of the cosmos via deification. In other words, every finality, including deification, takes "second place" to the glorification of God in his kenotic love manifested in Christ.

Balthasar's teaching on our theme is characterized by a habitual concern with the tendency for all theologies that fall short of ending conclusively with God's glory *alone* to get sidetracked by self-desire rather than desire for God; to focus on the accumulation of gifts for the self, rather than accumulation of praise and gratitude to God. In other words, in his mind all theologies that place *anything* before God's glory have an idolatrous element. Balthasar thus places a kind of "caveat" on all theologies that have mixed motives, that fail in their single-mindedness to proclaim *soli Deo gloria*! Balthasar's work is focused on revering the sovereignty and otherness of God, and conversely with warnings about humanity's tendency to accentuate self-glory. Balthasar summarizes this key vector of his thought when he asserts:

> God does not come primarily as a teacher for us ("true"), as a useful "redeemer" ("good"), but to display and to radiate himself, the splendor of his eternal triune love in that "disinterestedness" that true love has in common with true beauty. For the glory of God the world was created; through it and for its sake the world is also redeemed.[14]

It is clear that even the *modus operandi* of Balthasar's theology of deification has a kenotic character: it focuses on relinquishing control over finalities and humbly celebrating the fullness of God's glory, with disinterest towards the self or any personal agendas.

13. *GL* IV, 18.
14. Balthasar, *My Work*, 80.

Balthasar's Mode of Inquiry

As one begins to more fully explore Balthasar's conception of deification, it becomes apparent that his approach to the subject is unique, exceeding traditional bounds of theological method. Balthasar's theology as a whole is known for its creative and synthetic character—for dynamically connecting elements of diverse thought from various disciplines in order to highlight theological truths in a new and often original way. Balthasar is unapologetic about this kind of approach, believing that "being faithful to tradition" is not about "literal repetition and transmission of . . . philosophical and theological theses," but rather consists in "imitating our Fathers in the faith with respect to their attitude of intimate reflection and their effort of audacious creation, which are the necessary preludes to true spiritual fidelity."[15] So it is not surprising that he has described a collection of his theological papers as a "sketchbook," like the figure studies of Rodin or Marées, which "consist of outline sketches of an arm or a leg superimposed or juxtaposed; whether they represent a groping after the one correct curve, or whether, in fact, they represent the only possible way of reproducing human motion is impossible to ascertain."[16] This kind of *modus operandi*, while on the one hand capable of obscuring concision of thought, is on the other hand quite fitting, for theology in general and the theme of deification in particular involves the communication of *motion*: namely God's movement in love towards humanity and our movement in response, either towards the ultimate Good or the nothingness of evil.

Balthasar's self-characterization as a "sketcher" of theology is in many ways determined by the very subject matter of much of his writing. He tends to go down paths that few other theologians dare to tread, for example by delineating a theology of Holy Saturday, creating a "theological aesthetics" based on the transcendental of "beauty," and exploring the mystery of union with the triune God. These kinds of themes inherently require going beyond a purely cataphatic (or traditionally scholastic) approach, to convey personal, relational, artistic, intuitive, poetic truths—in short, a significant degree of apophaticism is necessary. Henri de Lubac provides an insightful comment on Balthasar's work in this regard: "Every word he writes envisages an action, a decision. He has not the slightest time for 'that certain economy of the mind which budgets and spares itself': everything is squandered that the 'personal meeting' with God may be arrived at without delay."[17]

15. Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 12.
16. *EXP* I, 7.
17. De Lubac, *Church*, 105.

While Balthasar's theology as a whole is unarguably dynamic, its far more important characteristic, which de Lubac highlights, is that it consistently conveys the personal, relational reality of the Christian faith. Consequently, we will discover that his conception of divinization focuses on overcoming the sense of relational distance he perceives in both Catholic and Byzantine models of the theme. For example, his portrayal of communal life in the Trinity has an intimate quality. Furthermore, instead of using more common (and more philosophical) terms to describe the reality of divinization such as the "analogy of being" and "*visio Dei*," Balthasar chooses the language of "reciprocity," "freedom" and "openness." This kind of approach reveals his embrace of many facets of the modern philosophy of personalism, which has significant influence on his theology of deification, particularly in providing a helpful means for him to illuminate not only God's relational Being as Trinity, but humanity's incorporation into trinitarian life.[18] Norman Russell also affirms personalist philosophies as providing helpful anthropological considerations to the topic: "by applying modern insights into the relational nature of personhood to the patristic teaching on deification, we can deepen our understanding of what it is to be human."[19] Russell makes a vital point, for becoming *fully human* is an issue that lies at the heart of the theology of deification and is only made possible in a relational context: through being joined to the Person of Christ. In our exploration of Balthasar's theology we will consider to what degree this relational approach is an appropriate and compelling way of expressing the mystery of *theosis*.

Another aspect of Balthasar's theological method that is important to mention is his patristic sense for integrating spirituality into his work. As Norman Russell in his study on deification astutely notes, "The Fathers were much more aware than we are today of the unity of theology and spirituality, and also of the unity of divine revelation."[20] In his *Theo-Drama* Balthasar surveys the Church's mystical tradition in his attempt to more fully elucidate humanity's participation in the life of the Trinity, not only because he

18. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states, "In its various strains, personalism always underscores the centrality of the person as the primary locus of investigation for philosophical, theological, and humanistic studies. It is an approach or system of thought which regards or tends to regard the person as the ultimate explanatory, epistemological, ontological, and axiological principle of all reality" (Williams and Bengtsson, "Personalism"). One example of Catholic personalism is that found in the philosophy of W. Norris Clarke, who emphasizes that to "be" is "to be together"; that real being creates relationships among persons and tends toward communion. See Clarke, *Person and Being,* 24.

19. Russell, *Deification*, 320.

20. Russell, *Deification*, 8.

considers the mystical tradition as "in continuity with the great patristic tradition from Irenaeus to Cyril of Alexandria, Ambrose and Augustine and their many heirs in the Early and High Middle Ages, right up to the Victorines," but also because the mystics "are all intent on describing something so ultimate, so divine, that its inchoate state on earth quite obviously points ahead to the ultimate, blessed destiny that awaits the human being filled with grace."[21] Balthasar particularly integrates the mystical thought of Adrienne von Speyr, with whom he founded a religious community—so much so that he freely asserts that "her work and mine is neither psychologically nor philosophically separable, two halves of a whole which, as centre, has but one foundation."[22] Balthasar's incorporation of mystical theology is rooted in his conviction that the most profound insights on this theme are available only to those immersed in contemplation and prayer, for union with God is a reality that far exceeds its mere intellectual conception.

This holistic approach, requiring both cataphatic and apophatic reasoning, is therefore considered necessary to convey the fullness of meaning that characterizes the theology of deification. For in order to do justice to the theme not only must the inherent mystery of divine truths be recognized, but the fact that "mystery" defines the very *character* of truth. For example, given that the Church has always been challenged in expressing the union of Christ's divine and human natures even though addressed at several Ecumenical Councils, it is clear that the reality of *theosis* inherently exceeds all attempts at articulation. Balthasar emphasizes that divine truths cannot simply be "grasped" intellectually, for they are intrinsically personal, experiential, and thus full of mystery:

> The only way to grasp the 'figure' of Jesus . . . is by *not grasping* it and by allowing it to take its place in the 'ungraspable' context of the mystery of the Trinity. This grasping by 'letting go' is what we mean by faith, and it probably requires more letting go than it is prepared for; fortunately, however, what it tries to hold on to will ultimately be wrested from it anyway. Mystery does not begin at the point where reason, having taken many rational steps, does not know how to proceed: mystery begins right in the middle of the Prologue.[23]

21. *TD* V, 462, 469. Balthasar investigates such diverse theologies as John of the Cross, the school of Rhenish-Flemish mysticism (Meister Eckhart and his followers J. Tauler, Heinrich Suso, and John of Ruysbroeck), and John Scotus Erigena.

22. Kehl and Löser, *Von Balthasar Reader*, 42.

23. *TD* V, 492–93.

It is therefore not only the content of the theology of deification that has a mysterious, even kenotic character, but also the *manner* in which it must be explored, according to Balthasar. Accordingly, the advice of George Macdonald, the nineteenth-century Christian writer, resonates with Balthasar's approach: "the best you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience is—not to give him things to think about—but to wake things up that are in him."[24]

Balthasar's use of apophatic theology does not, however, mean that cataphatic reasoning is left out, or that "reason" and "knowledge" are deemed impossible in the light of mystery. Because Christians have been "admitted to the 'marvelous light' (1 Pet 2:9)," and have received the Spirit, Balthasar avows that "it *is* possible to have infinite progress within the New Covenant; the Fathers (Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine) frequently speak of it."[25] Consequently, he fully affirms that the theological drama we are immersed in

> *can* mediate ever-deeper insight into the profound mystery of God, not in the sense of the Scholastic accumulation of concepts—which is surely behind us by now—but in the sense of an ever-deeper insight 'with all the saints' into the dimensions of 'the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God' (Eph 3:18–19).[26]

A Preliminary Note on Terminology

It is important to clarify before progressing further that Balthasar often does not use classic terminology when discussing the theme of humanity's union with God. Although the terms "theosis," "divinization," and "deification" are present in his work, they are less common than more general references to "participation in God" or "union with God."[27] Furthermore, in the fifth volume of his *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar uses an alternative and somewhat obscure word, *einbergung*, rather than the typical German word

24. Macdonald, *Fairy Tales*, 9.

25. *TD* III, 513.

26. *TD* III, 514.

27. As Norman Russell notes, "Although von Balthasar does not use the language of deification, he does present the content of the doctrine from his own perspective, in which God's mystical gifts are not to be sought as sensual experience, ecstatic or otherwise, but as 'a loving obedience to God's will which leads the one who is formed in Christ to a full insertion in the silent Word of adoring love'" (Russell, *Deification,* 315–16).

for deification, *vergöttlichung*, to describe humanity's ultimate union with God.[28] *Einbergung* is an expansive term suggesting the "enfolding" (or "sheltering ingathering"[29]) of creation into the life of God.

Regarding his use of alternative expressions for deification, there are several possible reasons for this. Firstly, in the third volume of his *Theo-Drama* he accentuates the limits of traditional terminology:

> "Divinization" [here Balthasar uses "Vergöttlichung"] (in Christ and through a participation in him) can never express the whole relationship between divine and created being. Even the fact that we are "born of God" (John 1:13) and thus (especially according to Eckhart) are drawn into the Son's "coming forth" from the Father, cannot alter the truth that we are creatures and not the eternal Logos.[30]

Thus, not only is "divinization" a limited term according to Balthasar, it also has a propensity to be misleading by suggesting a surpassing of humanity's inherent creatureliness, which comprises Balthasar's chief critique of conceptions of deification in general.[31]

His reticence to use classic terminology in order to avoid misperceptions about the Christian meaning of deification is also no doubt influenced by personal considerations. Balthasar's early life was dominated by philosophies and socio-political realities that conveyed purely human, godless and hence Promethean forms of divinization. For example, his academic career began during the reign of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin. Hitler in particular believed that he and his fellow Aryans had divine qualities, and hence were above and beyond moral norms, and destined to become the ruling *übermensch* of the world. It is therefore not surprising that Balthasar's earliest writings addressed the philosophy of Nietzsche, the myth of Prometheus, and German Idealism.[32]

Another probable reason for Balthasar's use of alternative terminology is that the theme is loaded with eastern Christian concepts, something Balthasar sought to avoid in order to present his own Catholic theology of union with God. Even though he accepts and incorporates many aspects of Byzantine thought into his own understanding of *theosis*, he by no means affirms all aspects of the eastern doctrine. At the same time, he also at times

28. As Nicholas Healy notes, "In *The Final Act*, Balthasar seems to prefer the term 'Einbergung' to 'Vergöttlichung' in *Eschatology*" (Healy, *Eschatology*, 160n4).

29. Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 224.

30. *TD* III, 229n68.

31. This will be discussed in chapter 7.

32. Balthasar, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*.

refrains from fully embracing common Catholic expressions of the meaning of union with God, choosing rather to convey his own more personal and relational conceptions.

Finally, Balthasar's infrequent use of classical terminology of the theology of deification can be explained simply by his idiosyncratic *modus operandi*. Throughout his treatment of various theological themes Balthasar regularly shows a proclivity to express things from a different angle in order to break through calcified layers of meaning attached to them. The frequent substitution of terms characterizes Balthasar's theological work as a whole. This consistent attempt to illumine doctrine in new ways has its pros and cons: it can be refreshing in both expanding horizons and casting new light on a topic; however, it can also obfuscate already complex issues, and steer one towards tangential streams of thought. As we will see, in Balthasar's theology of deification it does both.

In a chapter entitled "Divinization and Incorporation" in the third volume of the *Theo-Logic*, Balthasar briefly addresses the differences between eastern and western terminology regarding deification and seeks to minimize them. He speaks of the "unity of the (more Greek) concept of 'divinization' and the (more Latin) concept of 'incorporation into Christ,'" asserting that "on closer inspection, the differences between these two concepts are almost entirely obliterated," and that "Augustine himself will not reject the concept of 'divinization.'"[33] It is unfortunate, however, that he only fleetingly addresses this very important issue. In trying to harmonize the two, and particularly point out that the West never abandoned the theme, he simply notes that Augustine's theology of divinization is basically a reiteration of the Fathers—that "because of Christ's Incarnation and Eucharist, we are incorporated into him, our Head, as his members"—then remarks that it "would be superfluous to present all the texts in the other Latin Fathers that speak of the unity of incarnation and divinization."[34] He concludes his too-brief survey by noting that Ambrose and Hilary emphasized the "exchange" between God and Man, and that "monks of the twelfth century" and various scholastics—particularly Albert and Thomas—spoke about humanity's participation in the divine nature.[35]

Despite Balthasar's unique approach and terminology, in the end he neither neglects nor disagrees with classic understandings of deification. He fully affirms the Pauline vision in Romans 8 of the participation of the entire cosmos in humanity's promise of wholeness and perfection, affirming

33. *TL* III, 186.
34. *TL* III, 189, 190.
35. Cf. *TL* III, 189–90.

that the whole of creation (πᾶς κτίσις) "has been drawn into the destiny of redeemed man" through the resurrection of Christ, and that the process of this universal redemption is "of central concern to the gospel."[36] Likewise, he upholds the belief first championed by Irenaeus, developed by the Cappadocian Fathers, and synthesized by Maximus the Confessor that "the world has a teleology, a destination *in God.*"[37]

36. *TD* V, 419–20.

37. *TD* V, 413. Italics mine.

4

The Analogy of Being

How can a natural being, which must necessarily die (as he must as part of a genus and a race), be conceived as united, to the point of identity, with an infinite spiritual and personal being with infinite claims of knowledge and love?[1]

The most fundamental question raised by the notion of deification is a metaphysical one: how is union between the created and uncreated, the finite and infinite, even possible? Any suggestion of union between God and humanity implies a mixing of the natural and supernatural, which are by definition mutually exclusive. In other words, all theologies of divinization must deal with the *diastasis* of heaven and earth—the *maior dissimilitudo* between the Creator and creation. More specifically, any Christian model for conveying divine/non-divine interaction must, if it is to be faithful to God's self-revelation, somehow adequately express the likeness of creation to its Creator while at the same time maintaining its unlikeness, affirming God's presence *in* the world (his immanence) while respecting His difference *from* the world (his transcendence).

Myrrha Lot-Borodine's important study, *La Déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs*, helps to set the groundwork for this theme as she explored this foundational issue via the theology of Augustine, who sought to unravel the conundrum of how God and humanity could interpenetrate (*compénétration*). Would not real communion between the divine

1. *TA*, 48.

and human necessarily both diminish the divine and utterly overwhelm (and thus reduce to nothingness) the human? The very idea seems to lie between Scylla and Charybdis: the difference between the divine and created order cannot be reduced without harming the integrity of either; conversely, if the difference is reverently accentuated then no real union seems possible. To put it another way, diminishing the distance between the divine and human in a too-immediate unity results in a pantheistic understanding of a fusion between God and creation; equally, insistence on the distance between the two seems to degrade the meaning of *theosis* by merely juxtaposing the creature and Creator in a too-distant relationship.[2] Thus, any theology of deification must maintain and unite both God's holy transcendence and humanity's creatureliness.[3]

At the foundation of Balthasar's theology of deification is his affirmation of the *analogia entis* ("analogy of being"), a metaphysical principle which he believes provides the best theological underpinning for addressing this issue. The principle asserts that the use of analogy when speaking of God is both useful and necessary, for creation—by its very existence—provides an analogy through which human reason can discern the divine. The use of analogy for describing the relationship between matter and spirit is evident in Aristotelian philosophy, incorporated into the scholastic tradition via Thomas Aquinas, and has been most recently developed and championed by Erich Przywara, a German-Polish theologian whose writings greatly influenced Balthasar in his formative years as a theologian.[4]

Balthasar's theological career was just underway when in the early 1930s an important debate commenced between Przywara and the Protestant theologian Karl Barth on the theological use of the *analogia entis*. Because the principle addresses the very nature of Christian thought—the

2. Sherrard posits the conundrum as follows: "The full Christian understanding demands, thus, the simultaneous recognition of both the total transcendence *and* the total immanence of the Divine, the affirmation of the one at the expense of the other being the negation of this understanding and the supreme doctrinal error" (Sherrard, *Greek East and the Latin West,* 36).

3. The basic Catholic conception is summarized well by Pope Benedict XVI: "Man can indeed enter into union with God—his primordial aspiration. But this union is no mere fusion, a sinking in the nameless ocean of the Divine; it is a unity which creates love, a unity in which both God and man remain themselves and yet become fully one" (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 10).

4. Cf. *ST* I.4.3: "If there is an agent not contained in any 'genus,' its effect will still more distantly reproduce the form of the agent, not, that is, so as to participate in the likeness of the agent's form according to the same specific or generic formality, but only according to some sort of analogy; as existence is common to all. In this way all created things, so far as they are beings, are like God as the first and universal principle of all being."

foundation for knowing truth and conditions for Christian belief—much was at stake. So much so that Thomas J. White asserts that this dispute gave rise to "the single most important ecumenical controversy of the twentieth century."[5] There can be no doubt of the vast influence Przywara and Barth had on each other's theology, and (most importantly for our purposes) on Balthasar's.[6] A significant part of Balthasar's theological corpus is, directly or indirectly, a response to their respective positions with the intent of developing a fuller and deeper approach to this vital theme. For example, a central goal of Balthasar's treatise on Barth's theology, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, was to defend Przywara's exposition of the *analogia entis* (it was in fact originally entitled *Analogia Entis: A Dialogue with Karl Barth*). The fundamental issues raised in the debate provide valuable insights into Balthasar's thought, for they shaped his entire theological programme, and in particular his theology of deification.

Przywara's chief work on the theme, *Analogia Entis*: *Metaphysics—Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, published in 1932, was created with the intent of delineating a Catholic worldview based on analogy, which he considered "the fundamental principle obtaining between God and creature."[7] While the *analogia entis* conveys a positive, cataphatic affirmation of the possibility of knowing God through analogy, it is ultimately apophatic in character in that it places the greater stress on the difference between divine and creaturely existence and knowledge. As Przywara repeatedly emphasizes, it rests on the definition of the Fourth Lateran Council that "between creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them."[8] Thus, the fundamental premise of the *analogia entis* is that God indeed reveals himself in finite creation, yet infinitely surpasses that revelation. A chief component

5. White, *Analogy of Being*, 1.

6. Regarding the influence of Przywara on Balthasar, Werner Löser has gone so far as to assert that for Balthasar "the doctrine of the '*analogia entis*' was of decisive significance for every right-thinking philosophy and theology. It determines, whether implicitly or explicitly, all the expressions of his thought" (Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 2n4). See also Sara, *Forma y amor*. Concerning Barth's impact on Balthasar, John Webster asserts that it was "immense"; "Balthasar read Barth avidly from his student days and began to map out a Catholic response to Barth in publications from the late 1930s onwards" (Webster, "Balthasar and Karl Barth," 241–42).

7. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 362. As Betz affirms in his introduction to the book, "far from being a scholastic technicality, the *analogia entis* was to Przywara the standard of a properly Catholic understanding of reality, and, as such, crucial to the apologetics of the Catholic Church in the modern world" (Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 44–45).

8. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 1:232. The Latin text reads: "*inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda*." Cf. *DS* 806.

of the "greater dissimilarity" rests on the tenet that God is *actus purus*: that while God's essence and existence are inseparable, the creature's essence is not (and can never be) identical with its existence. Therefore, finite being is described by Przywara as "a *tension* [*Spannung*] between essence and existence"; the two are kept distinct while affirming their "dynamic unity."[9]

Karl Barth did not object to the use of the *analogia entis* as a principle affirming God's transcendent otherness, but rather the role of human reason in theology, and specifically its presumptive use in discerning God's presence in creation and history. The *analogia entis* implicitly affirms that the order of creation can be discerned by reason, that faith and reason are integrally connected, and hence philosophy is the handmaid of theology. Barth strongly objected to this premise, going so far as to call the *analogia entis* "the invention of the antichrist," since he felt it was an attempt to explain the supernatural via the natural, thus affronting God's transcendence and diminishing the very meaning of grace.[10] Balthasar summarizes Barth's opposition to Przywara's metaphysical approach, which Barth consequently applied to Catholic theology in general, as follows:

> He accuses it of possessing an overarching systematic principle that is merely an abstract statement about the analogy of being and not a frank assertion that Christ is the Lord. This principle presupposes that the relationship between God and creature can already be recognized in our philosophical foreunderstanding (of natural theology). This means that God's revelation in Jesus Christ seems to be but the fulfillment of an already existing knowledge and reality.[11]

In essence, Barth objects to what he sees as the diminution of the centrality of God's salvific self-revelation in Christ, since according to Przywara's approach the foundation of knowledge of God is centered on human reason (i.e., philosophy) and God is thus deemed accessible without this special revelation. The danger of the *analogia entis* for Barth is its potential to become a kind of neutral "law" separated from faith (i.e., from the revelation of Christ and Christian obedience), at which point it becomes a kind of "tool against God."[12] Furthermore, in his view it implies that God's presence can somehow be discerned in politics, culture, economics, etc., a presumption that disregards the requisite attention to the radicality of human sin which clouds and perverts human reason and action. Throughout

9. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 47.
10. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1:xiii.
11. *KB*, 37.
12. *KB*, 161.

his debate with Przywara he adamantly focuses on the centrality of Christ as the sole foundation of Christian knowledge, considering any emphasis on natural theology to be not only peripheral to the gospel, but a dangerous diversion from it inspired by intellectual hubris. In this, Barth reveals his affinity for Martin Luther's castigation of human reason as the "devil's whore" when applied to spiritual matters, adopting a dialectical approach towards the relationship between philosophy and theology, the latter which necessarily defies and supersedes logic. In short, he believes that the *analogia entis* is a vehicle for humanity to assert its similarity with God, thus obscuring and depreciating God's grace, which is alone salvific.

While Barth's concerns about the role of metaphysics in theology are important, many of his criticisms of the *analogia entis* are misguided in that he consistently misses the very foundational tenet of Przywara's ontology: that any analogy between creature and Creator is inherently qualified by the recognition of the "greater dissimilarity" between them.[13] As John Betz rightly notes, "the simple point of the *analogia entis* (as far as its ultimate stress is concerned) is that any analogy between God and creatures is ultimately *only* an analogy—one that at a certain point fails, breaks off, pointing beyond every similitude, 'however great,' to an 'ever greater' God, who is 'beyond all analogy.'"[14] Przywara's metaphysics of the *analogia entis* is therefore far less about touting natural theology than about affirming the incomprehensibility of God's transcendence and the mystery of grace. It therefore cannot be viewed as a kind of "formula" of natural theology, as Barth consistently (and mistakenly) implies. Balthasar in fact insists that it is the very *opposite* of what Barth accuses it to be: "the analogy of being is the destruction of every system in favour of a totally objective availability of the creature for God and for the divine measure of the creature."[15] The principle is therefore not a static construction, nor a constrictive abstraction, but rather seeks to convey an openness regarding the interplay between God's immanence and transcendence. As John Betz explains, "the back-and-forth rhythm of the *analogia entis* is an explicitly *dynamic* one, tending always in the direction of a greater transcendence."[16]

13. The Fourth Lateran Council asserted that analogy is *defined* by this "ever-greater difference."

14. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 74.

15. *KB*, 255. Betz summarizes this issue succinctly: the *analogia entis* is *not* "a form of metaphysical bridge-building, which (it is thought) subsumes God and creatures under a common concept (namely, being) and thereby presumes, in a form of metaphysical Prometheanism, to span the gulf between them" (Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 48).

16. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 59–60.

While some of Barth's apprehensions about natural theology and metaphysics are appreciated by both Przywara and Balthasar, a critical difference remains: Przywara insists that the relation of God to creation *must* be conceived analogically in order to affirm the central doctrines of the faith (for example the goodness of creation and the Incarnation), for to do otherwise—by excessively contrasting them as Barth does—is to empty the world of all substance. In short, without the use of analogy how can one even speak of God?[17] Przywara critiques Barth for advancing a dialectical relationship between God and humanity that denies the causal bond between them: "Whatever belongs to the divine is diametrically opposed to whatever is human. . . . The only relation between God and creature is . . . that of the absolute 'No.'"[18] A general tendency emerges in the debate: while Barth tends to view the world "as simple negativity in relation to the simple positivity of God," Przywara's *analogia entis* affirms the *positivity* of difference.[19]

Despite the seeming diametrical opposition between Przywara and Barth's fundamental approach to metaphysics (particularly in the early stages of their debate), the latter gradually acknowledged that the *analogia entis* does have a role in Christian theology.[20] Yet, as Keith Johnson notes, it is a qualified one: "Barth does, in fact, hold that, in an analogy between God and the human, the concepts and characteristics used in that analogy apply to both parties so that there is continuity between their application to God and their application to the human. His key distinction, however, is that this continuity is the result of God's grace in Jesus Christ *alone*."[21] Barth's conception of the *analogia entis* begins with Christ, since any analogy between God and humanity can only be made in and through him, given that "the human in analogy with God is the human *in Christ*."[22] Christ is not merely

17. Norris Clarke helpfully clarifies the metaphysical foundation of this whole argument: "If God were not the ultimate causal Source of all the perfections we find in our world, we would have no way of talking meaningfully about Him at all. It is the causal bond which grounds all analogous predication about God. . . . [Thus God is] 'infinitely Higher,' not 'totally Other' than we are" (Clarke, *Philosophical Approach*, 78–80).

18. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 18n57.

19. Schindler, *Dramatic Structure of Truth*, 48.

20. Cf. *KB*, 149–51; Lösel, "Love Divine," 586–616. Conversely, Elizabeth A. Johnson has argued that "certain Roman Catholics (Söhngen, Balthasar) believe themselves to be in agreement with Barth" since the latter had "no basic misgivings about the kind of analogy propounded by Bonaventure" (Johnson, "Right Way to Speak about God?," 687n41).

21. Johnson, *Karl Barth*, 187.

22. Johnson, *Karl Barth*, 187.

the fulfillment of natural theology, but its foundation, since it is through him that all was created (John 1) and humanity was made in the *imago Dei*.[23]

It is regarding this central issue—the Christological basis of the *analogia entis*—that Balthasar's chief contribution on the theme arises along with its ramifications for his theology of deification. Regarding the primacy of Christ, and theology's imperative to focus on the salvific efficacy of his redemptive work, Balthasar affirms the general thrust of Barth's work.[24] This is evident in his work *The Theology of Karl Barth*, where in discussing the Christological foundation of the *analogia entis* it seems clear that Balthasar was convinced that both Barth and Przywara had the same Christocentric goal in mind.[25] At the same time, Balthasar thought that the role of Christology in Przywara's metaphysic was too limited, and therefore sought to expand and deepen it. As T. J. White rightly notes, "[Przywara's] theory of analogy is ground in the concreteness of revelation, but the living form of Christ and the Christological determinations of the analogy of being are still too vague."[26] Accordingly, beginning with *The Theology of Karl Barth*, Balthasar undertakes to amplify the thesis that Jesus Christ himself, integrating created and uncreated being in his very person, is the preeminent rationale for insisting that analogy has a fundamental role in elucidating the creature-Creator relationship. He maintains that the *analogia entis* is incorporated into the *analogia fidei* when God's self-revelation is "grasped at the point where it is most unambiguously expressed: at its center, Jesus Christ. For it is in Christ that God's revealed presence in history and creation can become an event for the believer."[27]

Balthasar develops this Christocentric theme beyond the thought of both Przywara and Barth throughout the corpus of his writings. Consequently, while their theology serves as an important catalyst for his early thought, and particularly in establishing the foundation of his theology of

23. Nevertheless, T. J. White makes clear that Barth's approach does not obviate the role of natural theology: "While knowledge of Christ implies a natural capacity for knowledge of God by natural reason (natural theology), the absence of an intrinsic capacity for the latter would render belief in the divinity of Christ impossible. This suggests that to the extent that there is a Christological *analogia entis* (an analogy between creation and God disclosed in Christ), this mystery presupposes a natural *analogia entis* intrinsic to creation" (White, *Analogy of Being,* 250–51).

24. Aidan Nichols makes this point more forcefully: "It is absolutely certain that the inspiration for [Balthasar's Christocentrism] derives, ironically for such an ultra-Catholic author, from the Protestantism of Karl Barth" (Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 4–5).

25. See esp. part II, chapter 4 in Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth.*

26. White, *Analogy of Being*, 204.

27. *KB*, 163.

deification, its prominence fades as Balthasar strives "upward and onward" to expand the Christian understanding of humanity's union with God.[28] This is particularly so regarding Barth's influence on Balthasar, for while the former's theology has a significant impact on the vector of Balthasar's thought regarding the theme of kenosis, it has little bearing on Balthasar's treatment of *theosis*. This is evident from the fact that "neither the *Theological-Drama* nor the *Theo-Logic* engages Barth at any depth . . . Barth's doctrine of reconciliation from *Church Dogmatics* IV is rarely referred to."[29] Balthasar's theology of deification goes beyond the metaphysical debate of Przywara and Barth as he develops his portrayal of Christ as the "concrete" *analogia entis* through whom all creation is reconciled and united to God. In his *Theo-Drama* it is apparent that he considers this overarching principle vital not only for understanding *theosis*, but for the proper discernment of Christian truth in general:

> Between the divine and the created natures there is an essential abyss. It cannot be circumvented. The fact that the person of Jesus Christ bridges this abyss without harm to his unity should render us speechless in the presence of the mystery of his person. As E. Przywara tirelessly urged (even to the point of exaggeration), this all-embracing law of being both limits and acts as a stimulus to all philosophical and theological thought; in the fact of this law, more than anywhere else, we discern the knife-edge between Nestorianism and Monophysitism that Christianity has to negotiate.[30]

Balthasar could not more forcefully emphasize the role of the *analogia entis* as a foundational principle that impacts all theological endeavours. As D. C. Schindler notes, it not only provides the starting point for Balthasar's theological work—"the primary aim of which is to understand God in the world in a manner that respects God's infinite distance from the world"—but analogy is the footing for the vast structure of his three-part magnum opus:

> Balthasar's decision to order his main systematic work around the traditional 'transcendental properties of being'—beauty, goodness, and truth—rests on a conviction that these properties are *analogous* in a paradigmatic sense, that is, that they may be

28. *TL* III, 433.
29. Webster, "Balthasar and Karl Barth," 242.
30. *TD* III, 220–21.

> used meaningfully to describe both God and the world without compromising God's radical transcendence.[31]

The principle of the *analogia entis* thus serves several critical functions in Balthasar's theology in general, and, as we will explore further, particularly in his theology of deification. Balthasar's formulation of such key themes as kenosis in *theosis*, "unity in otherness," and synergy are all shaped by its pressing implications. Yet throughout his work this shaping is never formulaic, for the *analogia entis* takes the form not of a metaphysical formula, but of the living Christ, and thus "explodes the limits of metaphysics as such."[32] As Przywara himself sums up his philosophical work: "only Catholic metaphysics, as illuminated by the Cross of Christ, is 'metaphysics' as such."[33]

31. Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, 58–59.
32. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 427.
33. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 81n227.

5

Theosis in the West and East

For the union between a limit of the ages and limitlessness, between measure and immeasurability, between finitude and infinity, between Creator and creation, between rest and motion, was conceived before the ages.[1]

—MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

The Catholic *Visio Dei*

In order to appreciate Balthasar's vision of humanity's eternal communion with God, it must be placed within the context of traditional teaching on the subject, in both the West and the East. In what way does he incorporate and/or develop these teachings in his theology? It is a given that both the East and West agree that the miraculous union of the human and divine is not only possible, but indeed actually occurred in the person of Jesus Christ, and is a reality offered to all humanity in and through him. However, over the centuries they have developed different (but not disparate) conceptions as to how this union—the miracle of *theosis*—takes place. Western (particularly scholastic) theology has focused on the '*visio beatifica*' as that which unites God and man in eternal bliss and thus defines humanity's ultimate end. In a passage in which Balthasar discusses the "eternal form of our lives in God," he affirms that the image of the "vision of God" has been the

1. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 60, quoted in Wilkinson, *Cosmic Mystery*, 125.

preferred image in Catholic theology for this "indescribable reality."[2] The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* provides a summary representative of Catholic teaching:

> This direct, intuitive, intellectual vision of God, with the perfection of charity necessarily accompanying it, is the consummation of the divine indwelling in the sanctified spirit or soul, for by this vision the blessed are brought to fruition in such a union with God in knowledge and love that they share forever in God's own happiness.[3]

Thomas Aquinas consolidated this teaching in the West in his *Summa Theologica*, accentuating the intellectual and visual aspects of union with God. For Aquinas, supreme fulfillment and happiness is fundamentally an activity of our understanding—i.e., what fulfills the mind.[4] Furthermore, although he acknowledges that the essence of God "cannot be seen by any created similitude" nor "seen by any created likeness whatever," Aquinas nevertheless asserts that seeing God's essence *is* possible through a gifted divine capacity, or "disposition": the *lumen gloriae* ("light of glory").[5] In fact, seeing God's essence is what defines beatitude for Aquinas: "the ultimate perfection of the rational creature is to be found in that which is the principle of its being; since a thing is perfect so far as it attains to its principle. . . . Hence it must be absolutely granted that the blessed see the essence of God."[6]

This highly visual model for describing deification, along with an insistence on seeing the very essence of God, was affirmed by Pope Benedict XII in his edict of 1336 entitled *Benedictus Deus*, where he states that the blessed who die after receiving holy baptism will "see the divine essence with an intuitive vision and even face to face, without any mediation of any creature by way of object of vision; rather the divine essence immediately manifests itself to them, plainly, clearly and openly, and in this vision [they] enjoy the divine essence."[7]

2. *EXP* IV, 440–41.

3. Catholic University of America, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 186, s.v. "Beatific Vision."

4. *ST* I-II.3.2, 4, 7.

5. *ST* I.12.2. "The created intellect cannot see the essence of God, unless God by His grace unites Himself to the created intellect, as an object made intelligible to it" (*ST* I.12.4).

6. *ST* I.12.1.

7. *DS* 1000.

Although this conception of eternal life in union with God with its emphasis on seeing God's very essence has been a prevalent model in Catholic theology since the medieval era, whether or not it should be considered *the* Church's authoritative teaching is debatable since it has never been officially enshrined as doctrine, and other models exist.[8] For example, Pope Benedict XVI highlights a basic variation between the two most popular expressions of beatitude in Catholic theology:

> St. Thomas and Saint Bonaventure define man's final goal, his complete happiness, in different ways. For Saint Thomas, the supreme end, to which our desire is directed, is: to see God. In this simple act of seeing God all problems are solved: we are happy; nothing else is necessary. Instead, for Saint Bonaventure the ultimate destiny of man is to love God, to encounter him, and to be united in his and our love. For him, this is the most satisfactory definition of our happiness. . . . For both of them . . . to see God is to love, and to love is to see. Hence it was a question of their different interpretations of a fundamentally shared vision. Both emphases have given shape to different traditions and different spiritualities and have thus shown the fruitfulness of the faith: one, in the diversity of its expression.[9]

Commenting on this diversity of thought, Balthasar emphasizes their underlying harmony: "The long controversy as to whether eternal blessedness consists in contemplation or in love ends quite simply: it can only consist in loving contemplation; for what else is there to contemplate in God but love, and how else contemplate except by loving him?"[10] Nevertheless, these two views reveal different angles of approach to the issue of humanity's union with God which are a presage for discussing not only the Byzantine theology of deification, but Balthasar's contribution to the subject. What are the benefits and limitations of describing such an ineffable union in varying ways?

Balthasar affirms the basic teaching of Aquinas and Benedict XII in asserting that God's essence is not unapproachable but will be manifest to the blessed in heaven. This, he argues, is because through the Word becoming flesh (hence made visible) the very substance of the divinity—the

8. There is no single position on this theme that has been "definitively held" or verified by an ecumenical council. See Paul VI, "Lumen Gentium" 25.

9. Benedict XVI, *Holy Men and Women*, 53.

10. Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible,* 117–18. D. C. Schindler notes that "there are some who affirm that Balthasar falls within what is sometimes referred to as the 'Augustinian' tradition, which privileges love, *rather than* within the Thomistic tradition that sees intellect as supreme" (Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, 88).

communion of the Persons of the Trinity—has been disclosed. While on the one hand he acknowledges that "each divine Hypostasis retains its own, irreducible mystery," on the other he asserts that "in Jesus Christ all these mysteries are not only visible, but given so that we may imitate them and they may dwell in us."[11] In other words, God gave Himself in the Son and Spirit for the very purpose of sharing his "intrinsic mystery" with humanity.

Nevertheless, Balthasar draws attention to the limitations of the long-standing Catholic tradition of the *visio beatifica*. This is not particularly surprising given his general willingness to question Church theologoumena that have either not been adequately explained or developed, or are found wanting in his perspective.[12] Here Balthasar critiques any simplistic notion of the beatific vision, stressing that the concept of eternal life "cannot be reduced to a spectacle in which we enjoy endlessly the vision of the Divinity."[13] Such a diminution of the reality of union with God would be a serious misconception for several reasons:

> In the first place, God is not an object but a Life that is going on eternally and yet ever new. Secondly, the creature is meant ultimately to live, not over against God, but in him. Finally, Scripture promises us even in this life a participation—albeit hidden under the veil of faith—in the internal life of God: we are to be born in and of God, and we are to possess his Holy Spirit.[14]

Balthasar's emphasis on the personal, relational—indeed intimate—aspects of deification is evident here. The blessed will not stand at a distance viewing God in his sublime perfection but will live *in* him. Balthasar likens overly contemplative and intellectual characterizations of heaven as "too much under the sway of an unconscious epicurism."[15] Instead of focusing on detached, static tranquility, he portrays deification as a dynamic and creative reality: "Paul's repeated assertion that we shall know God as we are known by him . . . does not mean a reciprocally fixed gaze or a reciprocal exploration, but primarily God's prior, free election of my creaturely freedom to move and unfold in God's infinite space."[16] For Balthasar, deification is about

11. *TL* III, 218.

12. The superlative example of this tendency is his theology of Holy Saturday.

13. *TD* V, 403.

14. *TD* V, 425. See also *TD* V, 395–96. Along these lines, one could add that beatitude does not merely "consist" in the use of the intellect as humanity's "highest function," as Thomas asserts (*ST* I.12.1). It *involves* the intellect, but is more fully described as a holistic experience of living in the presence of God and enjoying him.

15. *TD* V, 403.

16. *TD* V, 403.

relationship, movement and autonomy—in short, a vibrancy of existence opened up through encounter with the living God.[17]

Thus, Balthasar also objects to the distance, the "stance of one over against the other" which can be an issue concerning the traditional concept of the beatific vision. He suggests that Jesus' promise to the Samaritan woman—"The water I give him will well up within him to become a source for eternal life" (John 4:14)—is a "much better" way of describing the nature of our life with God now and in eternity:

> Not only does the divine gift that Jesus gives believers transform them internally, indeed, quickening them to an eternal life that remains eternal; even more, in its recipients it transforms *itself* into the gift that is to be given to others; only by being handed on can it be a true gift worthy of God. . . . All that counts is that we have been given the possibility, by virtue of God dwelling within us, of giving more than is in us.[18]

Once again, Balthasar unfailingly stresses more personal and engaged conceptions of what deification is about. It is inherently relational, and again, kenotic. It is about God's indwelling and hence, necessarily, the believer's giving of himself. Balthasar's position can be summed up with his comment that God's presence in our lives "is much more than a vision: it is a *participation* in the very surging life of God himself."[19] This by no means expresses a position over and against traditional notions of the beatific vision, but is rather an attempt to broaden and deepen common conceptions of its meaning.[20]

Because more expansive interpretations of the scholastic teaching about the *visio beatifica* like Bonaventure's and Balthasar's are well within traditional norms and convey valuable insights, it is clear that there is more room for theological discussion on this theme. Conceptions focusing singularly on the intellectual aspect of the beatific vision can be greatly enriched with relational and apophatic considerations. For example, the sentiments

17. This resonates with the Orthodox conception of *theosis* as represented by Georges Florovsky, as "that intimate intercourse of man with God, in which the whole of human existence is, as it were, permeated by the Divine Presence" (Florovsky, "St. Gregory Palamas," 115).

18. *EXP* IV, 441.

19. *EXP*, 442.

20. Aquinas himself goes beyond describing union with God in merely visual and intellectual terms: "God is happiness by His Essence: for He is happy not by acquisition or participation of something else, but by His Essence. On the other hand, men are happy, as Boethius says (De Consol. iii), by participation; just as they are called "gods," by participation" (*ST* I-II.3.1).

of Pope Pius XII on the subject—written over six hundred years after Pope Benedict XII's edict, *supra*—reflect a fuller vision of the teaching when he asserts that we will not only see the Divine Persons "with eyes strengthened by supernatural light" but will be "eternally most intimately associated (*proxime adsistere*) with the processions of the Divine Persons, and so share in the bliss of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity."[21]

The *Energiai* of Byzantine Theology

The Byzantine model of deification has focused more on humanity's this-world encounter with God and His deifying grace than the future state of heavenly union. Furthermore, eastern Christianity has developed a different manner of elucidating the theology of humanity's union with God. A significant reason for this has to do with the fact that since the advent of scholasticism Catholic thought has consistently adopted Aristotelian concepts and categories, whereas Byzantine thought has traditionally adhered to Patristic, and thereby more Platonic, modes of reasoning and expression.[22] While both approaches are valid *spolia Aegyptiorum* and have a revered place in the Church, they sometimes result in divergent interpretations.

The Byzantine theology of *theosis* is most fully represented in the teaching of Maximus the Confessor, as extrapolated by Gregory Palamas during the "hesychast controversy," a fourteenth-century theological dispute concerning a group of monks of Mount Athos who claimed direct experiences of the divine presence—specifically the "uncreated light" of Mount Tabor.[23] In the controversy, Palamas (himself a monk on the Holy Mountain) affirmed that the monks in question had genuine experiences of God, but with a very important caveat: they did not see or experience God's *essence* itself, for that is impossible given God's ineffable and unapproachable divine nature. Instead, the monks communed with God through

21. *TD* V, 425. Balthasar here quotes Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis* 80; *DS* 3016.

22. However, while in the West, the Aristotelian-based theology of Thomas Aquinas has primacy (see, e.g., Paul VI, "Optatam Totius" 15), Vladimir Lossky asserts that in the East, "there is no philosophy *more* or *less* Christian. Plato is not more Christian than Aristotle" (Lossky, *Mystical Theology,* 42).

23. As Nicholas Constas asserts, "Maximos's distinction between essence and energies, his doctrine of uncreated grace, and his theology of divinization so profoundly shaped the Hesychastic theology of the fourteenth century that the latter cannot be understood properly without recourse to the *Ambigua* and, to a lesser extent, the *Questions to Thalassios*" (Maximos, *On Difficulties,* xxviiin2). Thus, although Palamas's theology of the "uncreated energies" of God is often depicted as a later development of Byzantine theology and hence novel, the concept is evident in the writings of the Church Fathers in the early centuries of the Church. Cf. Lossky, *Mystical Theology,* 71–75.

His "divine *energies*." This explanation reflects the teaching of the eastern Fathers that "God, in whose essence created beings do not participate, but who wills that those capable of so doing shall participate in Him according to some other mode, never issues from the hiddenness of His essence; for even that mode according to which He wills to be participated in remains perpetually concealed from all men."[24]

Norman Russell helpfully summarizes the basic teaching of Palamas: "In his essence (*ousia*) God was beyond even Godhead but in his operations or energies (*energiai*) he came into an intimate relationship with the contingent order, so that the worthy could participate in him through attaining a vision of the divine light."[25] As Russell goes on to explain, for Palamas this light is neither created nor natural, nor can it be merely described as God's grace; rather

> the deifying light is essential, not symbolic, but is not itself the essence of God. The grace which is experienced by those who see this light is not a *thing* but a *relationship*. At the same time it goes beyond relationship. For although God unites himself with man, he remains wholly other. Deification therefore goes beyond natural perfection. It refers to the transformation of our nature by divine action.[26]

Palamas acknowledges with the Greek Fathers that the Incarnation has already in principle accomplished the divine transformation of human nature, yet he asserts that "it also needs to be appropriated and realized by the individual," particularly through baptism and immersion in the life of the Church. Consequently, the vision of the divine light is the fruit of spiritual progress, a pledge of the future promise made complete eschatologically.[27]

Palamas's theological victory in the debate led to the consolidation of the classic distinction between God's "essence" and "energies" in Orthodox belief concerning human participation in the divine. This teaching, that "the divine and deifying illumination and grace is not the essence but the energy of God," has been considered doctrine in the Orthodox Church since that time.[28] It should be emphasized that as a result of the foregoing debate, Or-

24. Maximus the Confessor quoted in Palmer et al., *Philokalia*, 2:165.

25. Russell, *Deification*, 304.

26. Russell, *Deification*, 305. Citations omitted.

27. Russell, *Deification*, 305.

28. Gregory Palamas quoted in Lossky, *Mystical Theology,* 70. It is worth noting that in the New Testament, the Greek noun ἐνέργεια (*energeia*) is used solely in reference to spiritual (i.e., superhuman) activity or power, not in the way "energy" is used often mechanically and/or indiscriminately in the English language. As Norman Russell notes,

thodox (specifically hesychast) spirituality maintains that it is possible to experience the beatific vision (i.e., the "Taboric light") not simply in heaven, but even in this life, and that this experience is itself deifying.

Even this brief summary highlights the significant difference between eastern and western conceptions of the *visio Dei*, and what union with God entails. In contrast to the Catholic conception of the *visio beatifica*, the blessed cannot see the essence of God in Orthodox teaching but only God's energies.[29] Furthermore, while the East speaks of participation in God through His energies, the West describes union primarily via a divinely-gifted quickening of the intellect (the *lumen gloriae*) which makes possible the vision of God.

Nevertheless, these views are by no means mutually exclusive, or even necessarily contradictory as many theologians have historically argued. For example, regarding the knowability of God's essence, John Zizioulas focuses on similarities between eastern and western views, suggesting that disagreement has more to do with grammar than true theological disparity:

> We cannot know the infinite nature of God because we cannot subject it to human thought. Instead, we can only know it through the creation. For Denys [the Areopagite], this means that any predication of God is only a "divine name," but not a proper description of the essence of God itself, which is ultimately unknowable. For Aquinas, we can only speak of God analogically, but we cannot speak properly of the divine essence. These two views are very close.[30]

Bruce Marshall likewise views the Palamite distinction between essence and energies as compatible with scholastic theology when their respective conceptions of "participation" are taken into consideration. The apparent dichotomy between the two concerning whether or not deification involves participating in God's very essence does not necessarily imply incongruity "but rather signals that they have different concepts of participation."[31] Marshall argues that for Palamas, any language conveying participation in God's

"At Constantinopolitan councils held in 1347 and 1351 the Church . . . accepted the teaching of Gregory Palamas as Orthodox doctrine. . . . [In 1368] his proclamation as a saint enshrined the hesychast doctrine of deification as the Orthodox Church's noblest expression of the content and purpose of the spiritual life" (Russell, *Deification*, 308–9).

29. Yves Congar characterizes the Orthodox view as follows: "The essence . . . is hidden in a 'cloud' and in 'darkness' and remains absolutely inaccessible to the view of any created mind even when divinized by grace" (Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians,* 218).

30. Zizioulas, "Lessons on Christian Dogmatics."

31. Marshall, "Action and Person," 392.

essence necessarily implies the creature's fusion with God (an untenable belief because it betrays both God's transcendence and our eternal creatureliness) since God's "being" is in principle integrally defined by the "participation" of His triune nature. For Aquinas, on the other hand, "the persons of the Trinity do not participate in their nature, but possess it essentially . . . it is always creatures who have their being, essence, or attributes by participation, and never God."[32] Thus, for Aquinas, creaturely participation in God's essence does not imply fusion. Marshall's attempt to reconcile eastern and western theologies on this matter is one example that assumed irreconcilable differences may not be what they seem, and perhaps can be overcome with more theological acuity and mutual understanding.[33]

Similar to his critique of the scholastic conception of the beatific vision, Balthasar's chief concern with the Byzantine understanding of deification is that it seems to be inconsistent with the relational, self-giving nature of God. He believes that Palamas's theology in its accentuation that God's essence remains eternally hidden creates too much distance between God and humanity, obfuscating God's desire to be truly known via His self-revelation in Christ. This is based on his conviction that "we are bound to agree with Thomas Aquinas when he says that we must have a direct participation in the divine essence if we are to be able to behold him."[34] Given that Balthasar makes no distinction between the divine essence and energies, this assertion is simply one of logic for "by means of a mere created cognitive image, God could not be seen 'as he is.'"[35] At the same time, Balthasar is careful to clarify that Aquinas "in a way that is entirely in accord with the Fathers of the fourth century—[adds] that if by seeing and understanding we mean 'embracing totally' (*includere*), then 'sic nullo modo Deus comprehenditur . . . cum sit infinitus.' Infinite love will not be caught and held, but the more love there is, the more it can penetrate what exceeds its grasp."[36] Furthermore, Balthasar provides another qualification to Aquinas's insistence on "direct participation" when he suggests that seeing God's essence is only a glimpse, and one granted only through our incorporation in Christ: "Through the Son's glory we glimpse the abyss of the invisible Father's love-glory in the Holy Spirit's twofold love."[37]

32. Marshall, "Action and Person," 393.

33. For another treatment of the theme highlighting commonalities, see Williams, *Ground of Union*, 6.

34. *TL* III, 448.

35. *TL* III, 448n2.

36. *TL* III, 448n2. "In no way is God comprehended, because he is infinite."

37. *TL* III, 448. The issue is highlighted by Balthasar in quoting Gregory of Nyssa, who likens life in God to contemplating a spring of water: "[One] is amazed at its

Despite the fact that Balthasar apophatically speaks of encountering a love that "will not be caught," participation in God's essence as exceeding one's grasp, and the vision of God's essence as only a "glimpse," Balthasar nevertheless simultaneously insists that God manifests his very essence to the blessed through Christ.[38] Thus, it is not surprising that Balthasar's main critique of Palamas's theology is that it "undermines the triune God's economic self-communication."[39] He asserts that for Palamas, God is conveyed as "a subject reposing in himself and his mystery," given the latter's insistence that "the creature, even in eternal bliss, only sees God's 'energies,' not his essence."[40]

Palamas's vision of God, where "Trinity and the 'energies' seem so closely linked," reminds Balthasar of the theology of Eckhart: "Trinity as the face of God turned toward the world, behind which the unknowable abyss of God's unity remains hidden."[41] Balthasar suggests that the Byzantine view results in a bifurcation of God—that there is a hidden, unknowable entity beyond the face that God presents to humanity. Beyond the three Persons there can be no "fourth thing" (i.e., God's "essence"), he insists, since each Person is "identical with God's essence."[42] Aidan Nichols, in *No Bloodless Myth*, helpfully summarizes Balthasar's argument here: "Since each divine person is identical with the divine Essence itself, that Essence can be no fourth quantity, alongside the three of Father, Son and Spirit, for it is identical with the 'event' (*Geschehen*) of the eternal coming-to-be of the Trinity."[43]

welling-up endlessly . . . but he will never suggest that he has seen all the water" (*TD* V, 397).

38. Cf. St. John Chrysostom, who affirms real participation in the divine nature while insisting (*contra* Balthasar) that God is not only incomprehensible but eternally "unapproachable": "A thing is said to be incomprehensible when those who seek after it fail to comprehend it, even after they have searched and sought to understand it. A thing is unapproachable which, from the start, cannot be investigated nor can anyone come near to it." He goes on to assert that even the Seraphim, who cover their faces and feet with their wings, "did not see the pure light itself nor the pure essence itself" (John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, "Homily III" 8, 12, 15).

39. *TL* III, 130.

40. *TL* III, 128. Traditional Catholic theology (particularly scholastic thought), following Aquinas, defines God as *actus purus*: God's essence is his existence (see *ST* I.45.3). If so, then *de facto* God's energies are identical with his essence. Furthermore, in lieu of this divine simplicity, no distinction regarding God's Being is permitted except that of the Persons of the Trinity. Within this framework of thought, any discussion of "energies" seems not only superfluous, but risks conveying a bifurcation of God.

41. *TL* III, 129.

42. *TD* V, 66.

43. Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 191. Balthasar here reiterates the consensus of Catholic thought on the matter, for example, in Yves Congar's description of the beatific

Balthasar's critique of Byzantine theology on this matter is rooted in the concern that any theology that poses a *deus absconditus* whose oneness seems divorced from his self-manifestation as Trinity is not only too dialectical, but *de facto* a form of nominalism. Separating *oikonomia* and *theologia* too distinctly contradicts the foundational Christian belief that God's being and works mutually reveal each other, erroneously implying that God's hidden "oneness" may not be consistent with his revelation as three Persons.[44] This is a recurrent issue in Balthasar's thought, and he confronts its risks not only here in reference to Palamite theology, but also in Calvinism, Lutheranism and even forms of Thomism.[45] In short, he is convinced that nominalism "'tears open an abyss' in theology whereby 'negativity' and thereby the devil play too important a role."[46] Affirming the conviction of Karl Barth that the "economic Trinity, and it alone, reveals to us the immanent Trinity," Balthasar asserts that therefore any "description of the essential properties of a *nuda essentia* [naked essence] of God that leaves the hypostases out of account is, in the extreme case, 'strict nominalism' and, in the case of many Christian thinkers, 'semi-nominalism.'"[47]

A direct ramification of this, and arguably Balthasar's chief concern with the essence/energy distinction, is his nagging conviction that in distinguishing God's essence from His trinitarian self-revelation Byzantine theology ultimately fails to convey God's true character as kenotic and self-giving.

vision: "We see God as he sees himself; there is no question here of an unknowable essence, of a 'super-essence' distinguishable from the divine actions" (Congar, *Dialogue between Christians,* 225).

44. "Through the oikonomia the theologia is revealed to us; but conversely, the theologia illuminates the whole oikonomia. God's works reveal who he is in himself; the mystery of his inmost being enlightens our understanding of all his works" (*CCC* §236). Deirdre Carabine summarizes Balthasar's perspective on this point: "One of Balthasar's recurring themes is that the self-revelation of the glory of God is not something which somehow leaves behind it some aspect of the Godhead as unknowable and untouchable. It is not the case in this supreme condescending (*katabasis*) that in Christ only certain aspects of God are disclosed while other aspects remain hidden. Both the Son and the Father are revealed fully and are known entirely, not partially" (Carabine, "Fathers," 78).

45. "Balthasar sees this lingering nominalism in three theological traditions: the manualist tradition of Thomism where God's oneness appears to be known prior to, and independent of, the Triune Persons; in Calvinist predestination with its "eternal decree"; and in Luther's Christology. He interprets Luther's Christology as dialectical, opposing the God who is revealed in Christ with the God who is always also hidden. The hidden God is not the revealed God, and so the "ordained" economy is not necessarily the "absolute" economy" (Long, "From the Hidden God,"173).

46. Long, "From the Hidden God,"173.

47. *TL* II, 138.

That God "holds back something for himself," not fully revealing or sharing Himself through the divine Persons, is at the heart of the issue:

> Gregory Palamas's teaching that God's uncreated, eternal light that shines forth on Tabor, the quintessence of all the divine energies that can be communicated to the world, must be distinguished from God's eternally hidden, because incommunicable, essence is, if taken literally, as unacceptable as Gilbert de la Porré's or, for that matter, Eckhart's distinction between God and the Godhead. God's triunity is not some penultimate principle behind which lies hidden an abyssal "essence" inaccessible to every creature. Rather, in generating the Son and in giving him up to the world, the Father has 'given everything' without remainder, so that he has nothing left to offer when all this is refused.[48]

What is at stake for Balthasar goes beyond the issue of knowledge *about* God to addressing humanity's relationship and participation with and *in* God: have followers of Christ received a definitive revelation of God thus making full participation in His life possible, or is God eternally a *deus absconditus*, distant and thus, for all intents and purposes, unknowable? The question is critical for any discussion of deification, and rests on the ever-elusive goal of achieving some kind of theological balance in conveying both God's infinite transcendence and finite immanence, each of which is a *sine qua non* regarding the other, as manifested in the very person of Christ, God incarnate. While Balthasar characteristically prioritizes God's immanence, as in the above passage where he (perhaps too effusively) speaks of the Father as having "given everything without remainder," he also at times comes closer to the Byzantine expression of this balance, for example when he states that "the Creator manifests himself in creation as *Dominus* and *Principium et Finis*, while always lying beyond it as an inscrutable mystery."[49]

This antinomy deals with a mystery beyond human comprehension and thus even adequate articulation, therefore criticisms launched towards either the East or West should be appropriately measured. Balthasar does so in the above passage by qualifying his critique of Palamas's theology with the phrase "if taken literally," which underscores the inescapable issue of ambiguity. Although Palamas's essence/energies distinction is not merely notional but "real," it does not seem that Palamas ever wanted the distinction to be taken "literally"—i.e., as a kind of ontological division, or bifurcation, in God—given his repeated insistence that the *energiai* are indeed

48. *TL* II, 148.

49. *TL* I, 272.

divine, God himself present.[50] Balthasar himself elsewhere acknowledges that "Palamas strongly resists the assertion that he is dividing divinity into two parts."[51]

In summary, Balthasar's main objection concerning the essence/energies distinction of the Byzantine theology of deification has to do with the ramifications of its emphasis on divine ineffability: the failure to convey God's kenotic nature. For Balthasar there is a "remainder that is not given" in Palamas's conception—i.e., God's self is not really or fully given, but held back in incommunicable mystery.[52] Thus, the kenotic basis of Balthasar's theology regarding both God's nature and deification is once again evident: he is persistent in asserting that for God to be the God revealed in Jesus Christ, there must be an "all or nothing" self-emptying for the sake of the other, for only this accurately conveys the core of His very nature. God's kenosis must be at the heart of any understanding of *theosis*.

It must be noted that in the end Balthasar does not convey outright rejection, but rather ambivalence toward the Palamite distinction. He admits that he speaks both "with and against" Palamas, and even affirms that "God's 'essence' is not identical with his 'energies,' although it *really* manifests itself in them."[53] This conviction seems to be in harmony with other

50. The Orthodox theologian Kallistos Ware, in explaining the Palamite essence-energies distinction, insists: "These energies, in the Palamite view, are not merely the created effects of God's action in the world, but are themselves eternal and uncreated. . . . Likewise, the energies are not a part or subdivision of God, but the one indivisible God in the fullness of his self-manifestation. . . . Thus in the Orthodox view the essence-energies distinction in no way undermines the doctrine of divine simplicity" (Ware, "Salvation and Theosis," 177). Similarly, A. N. Williams argues that although Palamas may seem at times to assert an ontological distinction between God's essence and energies, he never seeks to define this distinction but rather simply desires to affirm God's transcendence and incomprehensibility. See Williams, *Ground of Union*, 148–56. For a more thorough discussion on the debate concerning the "nominal" vs. "real" distinction in Palamas's theology, see Finch, "Neo-Palamism," 233–49.

51. *TD* V, 406. This raises the ongoing theological debate between Byzantine and Catholic theology regarding the issue of the *distinctio realis*—the "real distinction" between existence (*esse*) and essence (*essentia*). Norman Russell highlights a central facet of the disagreement—that of scholastic versus patristic modes of thought. He questions how appropriate it is "to apply Thomist terms to Palamas. What, for example, is implied by a *distinctio realis*? Does this correspond to what Palamas intends by his essence-energies distinction?" (Russell, "Reception of Palamas," 18).

52. *TL* III, 130.

53. *TD* II, 195. Catholic theologians typically focus on the essence/energies distinction when critiquing Byzantine thought, yet there are parallels between the notions of the energies and the *lumen gloriae*. The infusion of the divine which provides the disposition necessary to see God's essence in the *visio beatifica* is neither a participation in God's essence nor created grace.

Catholic theologians who seek to reconcile Catholic and Orthodox understandings of deification, and could be interpreted as the very thing Palamas sought to convey in the first place.[54] Furthermore, Balthasar often conveys a desire to soften apparent incompatibilities by qualifying them theologically. For example, he argues that Palamas's theology, which rejects the possibility of seeing the divine essence, should be interpreted within his paramount desire to honor the divine mystery, spurning any notion that may convey the stream of tradition that supports the "crass rationalism of Eunomius, who said that we know God just as well as he knows himself."[55] Likewise, Balthasar asserts that Benedict XII's theology, affirming the 'clear' and 'open' vision of the divine essence, must be tempered by "the maxim common to all scholasticism, namely, that God can never be seen in entirety, even in *visio*."[56] In short, Balthasar wishes to emphasize that both positions are more flexible and reconcilable than they may at first seem.[57]

54. Jeffrey Finch notes, for example, that "several Western scholars contend that the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas himself is compatible with Roman Catholic thought on the matter," mentioning in particular G. Philips, Jürgen Kuhlmann, and A. N. Williams (Finch, "Neo-Palamism," 243).

55. *TD* V, 405.

56. *TD* V, 406.

57. His basic approach seems consonant with that reflected in the *Decree on Ecumenism* of Vatican II: "In the study of revelation East and West have followed different methods, and have developed differently their understanding and confession of God's truth. It is hardly surprising, then, if from time to time one tradition has come nearer to a full appreciation of some aspects of a mystery of revelation than the other, or has expressed it to better advantage. In such cases, these various theological expressions are to be considered often as mutually complementary rather than conflicting" (Paul VI, "Unitatis Redintegratio" 17).

6

Knowledge and Mystery

I kiss my hand
To the stars, lovely-asunder
Starlight, wafting him out of it; and
Glow, glory in thunder;
Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west:
Since, tho' he is under the world's splendour and wonder,
His mystery must be instressed, stressed;
For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand.

—GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS[1]

As we observed in the last chapter, for Balthasar mystery is by no means a disturbing hindrance to the greater comprehension of divine revelation, to be conveniently minimized or assailed with the power of reason; it is rather an integral aspect of truth to be embraced and revered. Balthasar expands and deepens the notions of truth and mystery by focusing on their intrinsic relatedness: the brightness of God's glory irradiates the darkness, while the darkness itself is a witness of God's glory. It is only with this in mind that one approaches his theology of deification with the proper perspective and can accurately interpret his stance toward the traditions of both the West and East.

1. A selection from "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (Keegan, *English Verse,* 780).

Balthasar's basic approach to the relationship between knowledge and mystery has its roots in his early involvement with the *nouvelle théologie* movement, which expressed criticism towards Neo-Scholasticism as a school of thought that too often acts presumptuously in trying to take possession of the divine mystery.[2] Balthasar steered away from overly rationalistic conceptions about God and too-precise attempts to harmonize human reason with God's often hidden wisdom.[3] In stressing the importance of revering God's "otherness" he went so far as to say that "even such formulations as (those of the great councils), like any other theological 'knowledge' of God, must become dangerous from the very moment when man ceases to know and to be conscious of whom it is he is dealing with."[4] In this, he follows the thought of Aquinas, who asserted that doctrine itself can ultimately only point to divine realities, never fully express them: *"Actus credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabile, sed ad rem"* ("the act of the believer does not terminate in the proposition but in the reality").[5] Spiritual truths are beyond the scope of human cognition, and thus require the assent of faith: loving trust in not only God's self-revelation as handed down by the Church, but in God himself. According to Balthasar,

> Christian thought, therefore, is radically different from the purely natural mode of thinking, which always proceeds by way of classification. Nothing that has to do with God's supernatural working out of salvation in the world is capable of classification. . . . Christian knowledge, therefore, advances not so much in breadth—new truth is not attained by the application of logic—as in depth, in that faith reaches through the apparent finiteness of the words and acts which constitute revelation to the infinite abyss of the divine wisdom therein contained.[6]

2. Balthasar, *Elucidations*, 36–40. He was following Erich Przywara's and Gustav Siewerth's line of thought, and supported Siewerth's contention that this attempt at eliminating God's hiddenness by asserting a precise knowledge about him via his revelation in Jesus Christ eventually led to the secular humanism and hermeneutic of suspicion of Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud.

3. He was influenced by Maurice Blondel and the new apologists in desiring to "correct a picture of human beings as thinking machines rather than as loving, desiring subjects" (Nichols, *Shape of Catholic Theology*, 78). At the same time, Aidan Nichols has commented that through his critique of scholastic theology, Balthasar did not ultimately reject it, but "repristinated" it. Cf. *MP,* 2.

4. Balthasar, *Elucidations*, 38.

5. Aquinas, *Quaest. disp. de ver*. 14.8.5; *ST* II-II.1.2.

6. *WR,* 38–39. Leonid Ouspensky, the Russian Orthodox iconographer and theologian, affirms the apophatic component of theology vis-à-vis describing why the architecture in icons is often illogically out of proportion: "The true meaning of this phenomenon is that the action represented in the icon transcends the rationalistic logic

Balthasar's theological conception of knowledge thus always integrates reason with faith, seeking to incorporate the *analogia entis* into the *analogia fidei.* Religious truth is embedded in the unfathomable mystery of divine wisdom—a wisdom whose character is inherently personal and relational.

Balthasar most fully addresses this theme in his seven-volume work on theological aesthetics, the *Glory of the Lord*, which explores the relationship between beauty and revelation. He considers beauty one of the three "transcendentals"—an eternal property of Being—along with goodness and truth. Theological aesthetics asks the questions: How is God's self-manifestation perceived? In what manner does the encounter between God and humanity take place? The notion of beauty has a primary place in Balthasar's theology (he begins his entire trilogy with it) because it "represents, on the one hand, the unity of truth and goodness, and, on the other hand, a mysterious point of intersection between the orders of nature and the supernatural."[7] In the first few pages of his seven-volume work devoted to the exploration of beauty he explains his goal: "to bring *the truth of the whole* again into view—truth as a transcendental property of Being, truth which is no abstraction, rather the living bond between God and the world."[8] Here we not only begin to see Balthasar's expansion and deepening of Przywara's conception of the *analogia entis* to include beauty at its very core, but also a more holistic and concrete view of truth as having an inherently relational, and thereby mysterious character. For truth is the "living bond" between God and creation, concretely manifested in beauty.

It is particularly the luminous force of beauty that accentuates the role of mystery as an integral aspect of truth in Balthasar's theology. He portrays mystery not primarily as the negative absence of knowledge, but rather as having a positive revelatory character. Mystery and truth have a mutually illuminating relationship: mystery indwells truth, while truth irradiates mystery. This is particularly the case regarding knowledge about God, which Balthasar likens to a kind of artistic perception:

> To be sure, if God is to become manifest in his nature as God, then a necessary part of this manifestation is his eternal incomprehensibility: *si comprehendis, non est Deus.* But here "incomprehensibility" does not mean a negative determination of what one does not know, but rather a positive and almost "seen" and

of men and the laws of earthly life. . . . [Architecture] is arranged with a certain pictorial "foolishness for the sake of Christ," in complete contradiction to "the spirit of gravity." "Such architectural fantasy systematically frustrates reason, puts it back in its place, and emphasizes the meta-logical character of faith" (Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon,* 191).

7. Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, 58.

8. *GL* I, 18. Italics mine.

> understood property of him whom one knows. The more a great work of art is known and grasped, the more concretely are we dazzled by its "ungraspable" genius.[9]

The "great work of art" in the context of God's self-revelation is of course Jesus Christ, the icon of the invisible God (Col 1:15). Christian truth therefore has *form*, given that its source and end is personal, tangible, *living*: "we ought never to speak of God's beauty without reference to the form and manner of appearing which he exhibits in salvation history."[10] This divine beauty, rooted in Christ as God's preeminent manifestation, differs and often clashes with traditional notions of "aesthetics" for it necessarily incorporates his salvific suffering and death: "it embraces the most abysmal ugliness of sin and hell by virtue of the condescension of divine love, which has brought even sin and hell into that divine art for which there is no human analogue."[11] This radical love which upends aesthetic norms and notions of reasonableness is the highest expression of divine beauty. Since it is not inherently attractive, but demands the eyes of faith, Balthasar insists that perceiving this beauty goes far beyond mere vision and involves being "enraptured" by the glory of divine being, drawn into the mystery of God's love.[12]

Knowledge of God—or better coming to *know* Him—is therefore an intensely personal and relational subject in Balthasar's thought, far exceeding mere intellectual speculation since it is enwrapped in the miracle of divine love. While insisting that this love revealed superlatively in Christ is the only sure foundation of truth, he likewise maintains that it is steeped in mystery, thus "truth must fall silent in humility" before it.[13] Yet this does not mean that truth is cast aside in the face of mystery, rather that the two are inseparable:

> Insofar as the mystery indwells the truth itself, insofar as truth is a moment in the self-disclosure of being, the mystery is not something alien to truth. From this point of view, the mystery is not some irrational background from which truth emerges.

9. *GL* I, 186.

10. *GL* I, 124.

11. *GL* I, 124.

12. *GL* I, 119. Richard Viladesau asserts that for Balthasar "the perception of this dimension of beauty, the ability to feel its attractiveness, its goodness, is possible only if our sense of what is good and desirable has been 'divinized,' if we see things from God's point of view, so to speak—that is, from the point of view of absolute love" (Viladesau, "Theosis and Beauty," 188).

13. *TL* I, 223.

> Rather, truth itself irradiates mystery, and it is of the very essence of truth to manifest this radiant mystery through itself.[14]

This radiance, comprised of the mystery of God's love, is the manifestation of beauty itself, the "eternal 'ever more' implicit in the essence of every being."[15] D. C. Schindler admirably summarizes Balthasar's thought here: "mystery has a positive sense from the beginning; it is not in the first place an opaque darkness but an excessively luminous one, and it is so precisely because the mystery bears a relationship of polarity, rather than of tragic opposition, to the sure grasp of knowledge."[16] Balthasar's reasoning here is reminiscent of his rejection of Barth's dialectical approach to the question of the relationship between God and creation as one of "tragic opposition." He likewise seeks to describe the antinomy between knowledge and mystery as having a "relationship of polarity," reconciling them by affirming their integration, primarily by emphasizing mystery's positive revelatory character.[17]

This helps to explain how Balthasar, in his critiques of both scholastic and Palamite conceptions of deification, can affirm God's eternal incomprehensibility while simultaneously striving to emphasize the possibility of really knowing and participating in the very essence of God. For the mystery of God in His apparent "hiddenness" is not, according to Balthasar, due to either a dearth of meaning or divine capriciousness—both of which convey a nominalistic impression that God is holding something back and therefore unknowable. Rather, mystery is a necessary aspect of divine truth, a manifestation of an infinite surplus of meaning rooted in love that cannot but overwhelm human thought.[18] As Schindler notes, for Balthasar the mystery of being "lies, not behind or otherwise outside of what we know,

14. *TL* I, 223. Balthasar clarifies this basic conception of truth in his *Theo-Logic*: since mystery is a "permanent, immanent property" of divine truth, "the knowledge of a truth, far from annulling its mysteriousness, actually brings it to light" (*TL* I, 131). Furthermore, this property of mystery is "most especially true in the case of personal truth, already in the case of human persons and especially in the case of the knowledge of God." (*TL* II, 68n5.)

15. *TL* I, 223.

16. Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, 73.

17. Balthasar affirms Przywara's conviction that "the summit of all creaturely knowledge of God is: to comprehend God's incomprehensibility" (Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 48n132).

18. Karl Rahner provides a cogent interpersonal example of this reality by referring to someone making the statement "This is my mother." While the minimum of the content has been communicated (i.e., the biological relation), the proposition has only begun to be explored in its meaning: "What an infinitely large number of things can be said about the 'ultimate' and the 'absolutely simple,' about an entity as such!" (Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 1:72n1).

but *within* it, because the mystery results from the expressiveness of reality rather than from being's relentless withdrawal."[19] While the unknown of God's being and actions may at times appear beyond reason (even irrational to the finite intellect) Balthasar asserts that this is due not simply to humanity's limited capacity to comprehend the infinite, but because God's ways are inherently *supra*-rational—expressing the depth and luminous beauty of divinity.

Balthasar is consistent in his emphasis that God has fully given himself in Christ and will continue to do so for eternity, for he desires to be known, which explains his insistence (with Aquinas) that God's essence can be seen. The inherent mystery of the infinite glory of his love not only does *not* detract from the reality of this vision, but is the very thing that makes knowledge of God possible, as he explains:

> In the end everything is comprehensible and unveiled only because it is grounded in an ultimate mystery, whose mysteriousness rests, not upon a lack of clarity, but rather upon a superabundance of light. For what is more incomprehensible than the fact that the core of being consists in love and that its emergence as essence and existence has no ground other than groundless grace?[20]

Balthasar's conception of knowledge (or better, "knowing") as immersed in mystery qualifies and transforms the notion of God's inherent hiddenness by highlighting its grounding in love, which for Balthasar *is* the divine essence: "The core of being consists in love." God is incomprehensible, yet this incomprehensibility is not ultimately defined by hiddenness and unknowability, but is rather full of meaning and even intimacy because it is rooted in love: "love is not just *one* of the divine attributes, any more than man's answering love is *one* of the Virtues," rather, love is the very "form of revelation (*caritas forma revelationis*)."[21] Since Balthasar, following traditional Catholic teaching, conceives God as *actus purus* (where event is inextricably tied to being), God cannot be an "unknowable abyss," rather the triune love "is identical with the divine essence."[22] It is the eternal "gratuity" revealed in

19. Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, 73.

20. *TL* I, 225.

21. Balthasar, *Love Alone*, 49. Balthasar's thought here follows that of Przywara, who, in referring to the theology of St. Augustine, states: "He is the infinite light that becomes ever more distant the closer we come to Him. Every finding is the beginning of a new searching. His blessed intimacy [*Inne-Sein*] is the experience of His infinite transcendence [Über-Sein]" (Przywara, *Schriften,* 2:281, quoted by Betz in his introduction to Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 60).

22. *TL* II, 140. In defining God's very *essence* as "triune love" Balthasar stretches the

the Father's love for the Son (and consequently for all creation) that is the "primal ground of the mystery of God."[23] God *in his very essence* is therefore knowable and approachable, according to Balthasar: one cannot separate his triune self-manifestation from his essence as an inaccessible "fourth thing" since they are one and the same thing.[24]

The heart of the issue for both the Catholic and Byzantine traditions in attempting to describe the reality of humanity's "partaking in the divine nature" can therefore be distilled to the intractable difficulty of maintaining the tension between God's proximity and distance, his immanence and transcendence. The Catholic insistence on seeing God's essence places emphasis on the former by refusing to separate *oikonomia* from *theologia* and God's action from his Being. The Byzantine rejection of this possibility places emphasis on the latter, refusing to harbour any suggestion of divine-human fusion or human possession of the divine mystery. Balthasar seeks to honour both emphases while stretching their traditional boundaries by highlighting God's love as identical to his essence—a reality both revealed and mysterious, characterized by the nexus between relational intimacy and distance. The creature's coming to know God involves a "unique relationship of revelation and concealment" where God is "revealed in ever-greater concealment":

---

limits of appropriate theological discourse. Aquinas (following John Damascene and Dionysius the Areopagite) rightly emphasizes that our knowledge of God is inherently rooted in negative theology: "Because we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather how He is not" (*ST* Ia.3, prologue). He goes on to explain that "we cannot know the essence of God in this life, as He really is in Himself; but we know Him accordingly as he is represented in the perfections of creatures; and thus the names imposed by us signify Him in that manner only" (*ST* Ia.13.2). This issue also arises in Balthasar's theology of the Trinity.

23. *TL* II, 140.

24. On this issue, Nicholas Healy asserts that the doctrine of the divine energies posited by Palamas and affirmed by the Orthodox Church "posit(s) an inverse relationship between knowledge and mystery. . . . [Thus for] Palamas, the aspect of God that is 'known' or 'participated in' ceases to be ultimately mysterious. This is why the essence of God must remain strictly unknowable" (Healy, *Eschatology,* 186). However, this seems mistaken for two reasons. Firstly, the assertion of God's unknowable essence in Byzantine theology is far more about affirming God's fundamental Other-ness and rebutting any intimation of divine/non-divine fusion than an effort to protect the mystery of God (e.g., see Marshall, *supra*). Secondly, in the theology of the Greek Fathers (and particularly St. Maximus), recognizing the inherent mystery of all being, divine and non-divine, is *specifically* an integral part of "knowing." For example, Vladimir Lossky notes that for Basil of Caesarea "not the divine essence alone but also created essences could not be expressed in concepts. . . . It is the unknowable depth of things, that which constitutes their true, indefinable essence" (Lossky, *Mystical Theology,* 33).

> God can be evident to him in his knowing and loving only in such a way that, as the free cause of all that is, God must withdraw more and more from a comprehension within the finite object and the finite structure of spirit. *Si comprehendis non est Deus.* The mystery of Being, which is manifest, invites the creaturely spirit to move away from and beyond itself and entrust and surrender itself to that mystery.[25]

Balthasar consistently moves the discussion from the abstract to the concrete, to the experience of mutual relationship, and in so doing illumines the positive, revelatory aspects of mystery in order to overcome traditional hurdles within the theology of deification. As our exploration of Balthasar's thought on the subject proceeds, we will discover that it finds its fullest expression in his development of the theme of Christ as the concrete *analogia entis*, who in his very person as the manifestation of trinitarian Being unites and hence overcomes the conundrum of similarity and difference.

After having surveyed Balthasar's response to traditional concepts of deification in both the East and West, his own unique approach and proposals on the theme are now ready to be more fully explicated. We have already seen that he believes the distance between God and humanity inherent in both approaches above must be overcome via a more intimate model of participation. For Balthasar, this model is rooted in Christ, particularly on humanity's incorporation into his very person and mode of kenotic being. Yet within this Christological context, he consistently and ultimately moves the discussion of *theosis* towards a trinitarian understanding and fulfillment. As Nicholas Healy affirms in *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, "Balthasar does not purport to 'solve' the problem of deification. Instead, he seeks to shift the terms of the discussion toward a more concrete consideration of the christological and trinitarian form of deifying grace. By anchoring the meaning of deification more securely within the figure of Christ, Balthasar opens up a new horizon that allows the tensions of identity and difference, knowledge and mystery, and created and uncreated being to be held together in a unity that avoids dialectical opposition."[26]

Balthasar's vision focuses on the *form* of grace—the *way* that union is realized concretely. However, it is not finally (as Healy suggests) Balthasar's Christ-centered foundation that "opens up a new horizon" for the theology of deification, since that time-honored approach is already firmly anchored in the patristic tradition, as will be made clear. Rather, a genuinely new horizon is opened via Balthasar's personalist, relational *modus operandi* in

25. *GL* I, 449–50.

26. Healy, *Eschatology*, 176.

addressing the issues. Balthasar emphasizes the personal, dynamic reality of communal life in the triune God as the highest truth elucidating the mystery of *theosis*. Thus, instead of focusing on the 'vision' of God, or participation in God's 'energies,' Balthasar turns his gaze toward the kenotic, communal nature and form of God himself—revealed in and through Christ—as the source and means of union between God and creation. Or, to put it another way, the discussion shifts from the "abstract reflection of essences" to the more existential "aspect of freedom."[27]

27. *TD* V, 402–10.

7

The Cleft between the Created and Uncreated

For the eternity of the cleft [between God and the creature] is at the same time the eternity of the juxtaposition that allows love to happen at all. Only where there is non-identity is love possible.[1]

Balthasar's article "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,"[2] one of his earliest theological works, serves as an important primer to his theology of deification despite the fact that his later writing reveals greater depth and balance on the theme, and deification is not even strictly the topic of the essay. Rather, his stated goal is to present an overview of how the "innermost structural law"—the core of the Christian message—has been communicated in the "three great spiritual periods of the Church": the early Church, the medieval era, and modernity.[3] His purpose in doing so is to identify and elucidate overarching contextual principles which can help the Church convey the gospel with truth and clarity today. In order to unearth these principles he first addresses the question, what *is* the gospel—the

1. *FSO*, 355.

2. Originally published as "Patristik, Scholastik und Wir" (1939).

3. "In order soberly to discuss the meaning of the three great spiritual periods of the Church (patristic, scholastic, and modern) to the extent possible in an essay, it seems to us that there is only one way to reach this goal: To press on past all external and superficial features of each epoch, to focus on its innermost structural law, and then to measure each respective formal law according to the structural law of what is essentially Christian as we encounter this norm in the Gospel" (*FSO*, 352).

"good news" (εὐαγγέλιον) at the heart of the Christian message? To elucidate this good news, he highlights the basic problem of human existence—i.e., the "bad news." The two are integrally connected in Balthasar's theology via the concept of deification, which embodies both the tragedy of human existence, and its ultimate glory.

What is Christianity's "living essence and core"[4] according to Balthasar? It is salient that he begins the discussion by addressing the topic of deification. He does so in a negative way, however: by insisting that the Christian faith has nothing to do with popular, universal ideas of deification. He specifically points out the dangers of seeking to "become equal to God," which he associates with original sin: "the very promise *eritis sicut dei* [you shall be like gods] is the perversion of the original core of man's being itself."[5] (While this first point of Balthasar, that the promise of deification *in and of itself* has a perverting influence, is extreme and highly contestable—on face value it is gravely mistaken according to the Church Fathers—it is balanced by insights later in the article which will be discussed.) For Balthasar, humanity's desire for deification inherently expresses a revolt against God: "After his expulsion from paradise man's religious ideal to become 'spirit,' 'sage,' 'mystic,' 'perfected' (to name but the purest and worthiest ideals) always means . . . that it contains a revolt against the Creator, a disowning of the nature in which man was placed and created: the earthly, physical-psychic, communal, spatial-temporal existence."[6]

Balthasar's condemnation of deification in its common form (i.e., tainted by the Fall) reflects the traditional Christian belief that pride—particularly the spiritual variety—is at the core of the breach between God and humanity. Pride is not only the first (Adam's) sin, but the source of all other sins, as described in Aquinas's *Summa*.[7] The latter defines pride as an excessive desire for one's own excellence, an aiming higher than one is, which opposes right reason.[8] If "aiming higher than one is" is at the heart of pride, then the desire for deification is *de facto* the ultimate form of pride, as Balthasar here makes clear. In other words, the biggest problem with pride is forgetting or usurping God, thinking one "has *from himself* that which he has from God," and desiring to be "singularly conspicuous."[9] Balthasar refers

4. *FSO*, 348.

5. *FSO*, 353.

6. *FSO*, 353.

7. *ST* II-II.162.

8. *ST* II-II.162.1.

9. *ST* II-II.162.4. Italics mine. It should be noted that Aquinas refers to exceptions to the destructive nature of pride that Balthasar does not discuss. For example, while evil pride is the desire for personal excellence combined with an aversion to God and

to this kind of thinking as "Titanism" and deems it the "general characteristic of the post-Christian era" which destroys any possibility of relationship between the divine and human: "According to the Titanic principle (in the modern sense), man simultaneously contests the divine legitimacy of the 'new God' (Zeus or Christ) and claims this divinity for himself on the basis of his equality with God. Thus He-who-is-eternally is reduced to the level of an ossified relic of the past; in his place the Eternally-becoming, the authentically living force, is enthroned."[10]

Balthasar's conviction that the desire for deification is the epitome of sin, however, begs the question: is this really *the* sin—that which corrupted the very core of human nature, fractured the entire cosmos by alienating humanity from God? The opposite can be legitimately argued: is it not natural—even good—to desire to be like the One who is perfect in being, the One through whom and in whom we were created in the *imago Dei*? God himself, after all, intended this "likeness" for humanity (Gen 1:26). Balthasar's negative characterization of the desire for deification seems overstated, for it is not the desire to be like God in itself that is sinful, but rather *how* this natural desire is played out. For example, Gregory of Nazianzus asserts that the tree of knowledge estranged humanity from God not because Adam and Eve desired the fruit, but because it was taken unseasonably and improperly.[11] It is this presumption, this self-will, and lack of trust in God that defines the Fall. In his later work, *Theo-Logic*,[12] Balthasar clarifies and qualifies his notion of original sin with a more balanced approach that is more akin to St. Gregory's:

> The primal and archetypal sin, is that *man makes himself the criterion* and so concludes that where *he* sees no barrier none can in fact exist. Now, it is not so much the yearning for truth as a whole that is to be considered disobedience, but rather *the way* in which it is sought—as a mere knowing without receptive faith.[13]

Likewise, later in "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves" Balthasar more expressly conveys that what is at the heart of humanity's condition of alienation from God is not the desire to "be like God" generally speaking,

---

his commandments, refusing to be subject to God and his will, Thomas also speaks of a "good" pride—one that is directed toward the glory that God bestows (*ST* II-II.162.1, 6).

10. *TD* II, 420.

11. Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio II* 25 (*PG* 35:435).

12. Originally published as *Wahrheit: Wahrheit der Welt* (1947).

13. *TL* I, 263. Italics mine.

but specifically an "original-sin-determined Gnosticism with its ideal of a pure spirit being, of an immediate apotheosis in place of the Christian 'law of conversion.'"[14]

For Balthasar this conversion is first and primarily about recognizing the unsurpassable distance between God and creation—in other words, affirming one's creatureliness. This is the cornerstone of his theology of deification and is repeatedly emphasized. The first, basic truth of human existence—the creature's "ontic ground"—is "the consciousness that an absolute Being stands over against it whose essence inconceivably consists in his being through himself and therefore in being what the creature essentially can never become."[15] Yet, he continues, this consciousness is consistently "pushed off" in order to make room for the egoistic belief that one is an "eternal thought of God . . . [or] a piece and component of the eternal world of Ideas . . . fundamentally no different than claiming to be a part God himself."[16] It is clear that Balthasar is addressing Neoplatonic and/or Gnostic philosophies that reject the earthly sphere in search of pure spiritual reality. He asserts that many of the great heresies—he mentions Docetism, forms of Protestantism, and Origenism in particular—are rooted in failing to embrace the Incarnation, which is the ultimate affirmation of creatureliness. Their fault is that "they all think they can fly higher [than our nature allows]."[17]

If the desire to become "perfected" through spiritualism is the essence of original sin, what then characterizes *good* desire? It "consists in the simple recognition and exercise of his nature . . . his creatureliness as the basis and starting point of all his religious movements and aspirations."[18] Balthasar emphasizes that the law of nature is the "law of distance and of 'being a servant,'" and should never be sought to be "overcome and abolished."[19] He insists that denying or attempting to erase creatureliness in a false apotheosis is "contempt for the law of being [which] leads on its own to torment and death."[20] Thus, any overly-spiritualized notion of deification is anathema

14. *FSO*, 366.

15. *FSO*, 353–54. Balthasar here alludes to a basic premise of the *analogia entis* in Erich Przywara's theology: that while God's essence and existence are inseparable, the creature's essence is not (and can never be) identical with its existence.

16. *FSO*, 354. Elsewhere, Balthasar strongly asserts that partaking of God's grace and divine nature (i.e., divinization) is in no way a natural phenomenon, an innate progression of the human being that is built into creation (cf. *EXP* III, 30–37).

17. *FSO*, 360.

18. *FSO*, 360.

19. *FSO*, 360.

20. *FSO*, 356.

for "creatureliness" is, and will always remain, the fundamental status of humanity, even in the context of growing union with God:

> This not-being-God of the creature must be maintained as the most fundamental fact of all, ranking first and above all others. That God is God: This is the most immense and absolutely unsurpassable thought. . . . And that is why, to the extent the creature comes nearer to God and becomes more "similar" to him, the dissimilarity must always appear as the more basic, as the "first truth." The more we know of God (and that always will be: the more we are "in God," since we can only know God through God), all the more do we also know that we are not God and that God is the One ever beyond all similarity, the ever more improbable, the ever ungraspable One. Or, as all the authentic mystics express it: The more we know God, the less we know him.[21]

Balthasar accentuates the same point in another essay entitled "Eschatology in Outline," when discussing the phrase "we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2) he asserts: "'What we will be' points to a transformation that will partake of the limitlessness of God without suspending our creatureliness and our own limits."[22] His primary "solution" to combatting humanity's desire for false apotheosis is thus to emphasize the impossibility of "becoming God," for "the first most basic factor [of human existence] is the uniqueness and divinity of God."[23]

Balthasar's negative characterization of the notion of spiritual "ascent" and his strong emphasis on the creaturely reality of human existence comprises the very rationale behind his conception of redemption:

> Because man wanted to overcome what was distinctive about his nature and wanted to shed what specifically belonged to his essence, his corporeality with all its needs, impoverishments, weaknesses in order to cultivate the spiritual side of his being (to get nearer, so he intended, to God), for that reason the weakness of the flesh (*sarx* and not just *soma*) is chosen as the crucial place of redemption, with all of the consequences that this entails: suffering, powerlessness, loss of courage, abandonment, pain, and death. God chooses the weak to shame the strong; he chooses the natural and the fleshly to shame the spiritual. For

21. *FSO*, 354–55.

22. *EXP* IV, 438.

23. *FSO*, 358. On this point one can discern the influence of Karl Barth's theology on Balthasar. Barth zealously emphasizes God's otherness and sovereignty as a preeminent theological and existential concern.

> man becomes these latter dimensions, spirit and *pneuma*, only to the extent that he remains rooted in his fundamental truth, in the truth of his nature.[24]

While God indeed chooses the flesh as the "crucial place of redemption," Balthasar's emphatic notion that spiritual cultivation epitomizes human sin once again causes him to make an exaggerated claim: that combating gnostic negativity concerning the body is God's reason for becoming incarnate. While there is truth in his characterization of the flesh "shaming the spiritual," it is nevertheless overly negative, for it suggests a too-strong dichotomy between the physical and spiritual—as if God is more concerned with "keeping us in our place" as creatures than nurturing our spirits by becoming one of us. For it is not the "spiritual" in man *per se* that is a problem, but rather the hubris of a self-centered spirituality.[25] Indeed, we are inherently spiritual beings, "amphibians" as the Greek Fathers often put it, on the frontier of matter and spirit.[26]

The foregoing passage gives us a clear sense of Balthasar's foundational theological stance and bearing regarding the theme of deification. Firstly, from an anthropological perspective, it is an inherently creaturely affair, a possibility steeped in the humility of the flesh. It is about embracing the "natural and the fleshly," rather than attempting to erase or surpass it. Secondly, from a theological perspective, God *Himself* has an "earthy" disposition, choosing to reach out to humanity in very natural, perhaps all-too-ordinary ways for our liking. He has chosen to save humanity in a kenotic way—in and through the "flesh," through the powerlessness inherent in the frail, temporal nature of earthly existence. This perspective is woven throughout Balthasar's theology of redemption (and deification), and hence permeates his entire theological corpus, shaping even his understanding of the three transcendentals, beauty, goodness and truth. Deification from a Christian perspective requires a reversal of thinking according to him: it is not about "the ascent to God by man on his own powers," rather the descent of God

24. *FSO*, 357. Balthasar highlights the difference between two Greek terms to underscore his point. Sῶμα is literally "body," and refers to the living person in his entirety. It is the word used in Christ's institution of the Eucharist, "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matt 26:26). Sάρξ is literally "flesh," referring to the explicitly visible, material aspect of the human person, and is used (among other places) in the opening of passage of John, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

25. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger summarizes this conundrum: "Man seeks total emancipation, freedom without limitations of any kind. . . . What this means is that man wants Godhead. The New Testament tells him that he is right in this desire but wrong in his manner of looking for it" (Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 63).

26. The Greek term *amphíbios* means "living a double life." Cf. Clarke, *Person and Being*, 34.

in Christ, through whom "all of mankind has been shown the exact place at which and from which alone its old longing for apotheosis can be fulfilled."[27] Consequently, the movement of divine descent which brings union between God and humanity can only be understood via highlighting the division between the creature and Creator: "the abyss between God and creature . . . become[s] visible in the death of Christ."[28] Because of the blindness of sin, the "sacrilegious presumption" of wanting to be like God, "truth can only be communicated to the creature by pointing out the gruesome cost of our restoration, underlined and italicized with the blood of the God-man himself."[29] Balthasar posits a "theology of the cross" as integral to the theology of deification.

This raises an important question: to what extent should divine truth be conveyed by focusing on negative, disjunctive aspects of existence, the "cleft," our creatureliness, and the "gruesome cost" of our redemption? Conversely, is not the beauty of existence, the truth that humanity is created in the *imago Dei* and promised a share in God's own divinity, also capable of doing so? Is focusing on opposites rather than similarities, dichotomies rather than unitive factors, the most effective and truthful way of demarcating a theology of deification? Should one focus on that which separates us from God (the darkness of sin revealed on the Cross) or that which joins us to God (the love of God revealed on the Cross); the utter impossibility of union (the "cleft"), or rather its possibility given God's original design for humanity (as created in the *imago Dei*)? While both are of course necessary, the Church Fathers primarily emphasize the latter through focusing on humanity's "likeness" to God, and the promise of deification, whereas Balthasar's theology heavily leans toward a "theology of the cross" reminiscent of Reformed theology. Balthasar in effect espouses a paradoxical "dedeification" through a focus on the separative darkness of existence as the means to *theosis*. However, as we shall later see in exploring his soteriology and theology of the Trinity, this is only partially the case: his theology of deification is not, finally, overwhelmed by the negative aspects of kenosis, but ultimately balanced and uplifted by it.

Balthasar expresses a more constructive theology of the cross later in the article when he states that it is in Christ's "total renunciation of his selfhood as the "servant of the Lord" in Cross and death . . . it is here, in his self-disappearing and "descending" that God's love for the world manifests and perfects itself. So where the creature is most a creature, God is most

27. *FSO*, 357.
28. *FSO*, 359.
29. *FSO*, 358.

God."[30] Here we are given a striking glimpse into a theology of kenosis that will take its fullest form in Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday. What Balthasar implies is that since God's love is perfected in Christ's kenosis (i.e., his "self-disappearing"), God is "most God" (i.e., reveals himself most fully as love itself) in this kenosis. God's very *nature* is kenotic, a proposition we shall see in his Christology, and even more profoundly in his theology of the Trinity. This kenosis is intimately connected to Balthasar's conception of humanity's *theosis*, for God's descent not only increases his glory, but glorifies humanity by revealing the kenotic path of ascent: the "fulfillment of the creature . . . [is] in its ever-greater contrast before the ever-greater God."[31] Therefore, the paradox of kenosis as the means of *theosis* is the very "law of the incarnation, which has established the emphatic difference between God and creature as the place and stage of union and has determined nature to be the basis and measure of grace—and the Cross and the tomb to be the place of the resurrection."[32] Balthasar explains how this emphatic difference or "cleft" between God and the creature provides the key to a Christian understanding of deification:

> For the eternity of the cleft is at the same time the eternity of the juxtaposition that allows love to happen at all. Only where there is non-identity is love possible. . . . For only this interplay between presence and distance lets us possess an ever more inexhaustible object of admiration and "divinization."[33]

Thus, love—and hence divinization, which is the perfection and fulfillment of love—is *not* possible where humanity seeks to identify itself with God. Balthasar goes on to take this thought further: it is the "relation of radical difference [that is] the root of all similarity and community with God."[34] In other words, our created nature is not something to be overcome by suppressing or denying it—as in the Neoplatonic conception of deification—but is rather the very precondition for communion with God. God does not desire to "spiritualize" us, but rather teach us what it means to be fully human: "every act of grace from God's side does not destroy this relation [of radical difference], nor does it abolish it but fulfills it through

30. *FSO*, 396.
31. *FSO*, 396.
32. *FSO*, 360.
33. *FSO*, 355.
34. *FSO*, 356.

'elevating' it, which grace effects: *gratia non destruit, sed perficit et extollit naturam*."[35]

It is ultimately the Incarnation of God's Logos that reveals and fulfills this truth that the "relation of radical difference" is the foundation of deification according to Balthasar, for the hypostatic union between the human and divine is "expressly consummated in the absolute 'unmixedness' of the two natures, indeed precisely in their greatest separation."[36] In his person Jesus restores the "right fundamental relation" between God and humanity. The apotheosis "which man in his presumption had tried to reach on his own" in a way false to his human nature, is now reached in and through the life of Christ. The Incarnation makes it possible for all of humanity to share in Christ's life, thus "lead[ing] to the most inconceivable exaltation of man to communion with God."[37]

Only at the end of his lengthy discussion on the descending movement of Christian existence and mission—its kenotic form—does Balthasar finally (however hesitatingly) affirm a positive conception of deification:

> It is the fundamental law not only of Christ but also of his Church that we possess the Spirit of God—and therefore the gift of apotheosis—*only to the extent* that we exercise humility (which means that we recognize ourselves as "nature" and thus as what is infinitely different from God), to the extent that we are obedient (thereby fulfilling the concrete ministry to which we are called, becoming like the form of Christ), and finally to the extent that we also understand ourselves in the distance that obtains between the members to the Head (so that we realize that we are being punished with suffering and failure first of all for our own sins and guilt; but we also realize that this suffering is part of the unmerited grace of Christ; that our suffering has been allowed to be taken into the suffering of Christ . . . helping in this way to redeem the world).[38]

Humility, obedience, distance, suffering: these are hallmarks of the only kind of deification Balthasar considers genuinely Christian. Its character is necessarily the antithesis of the Titanism he excoriates in the humanistic forms of deification mentioned above. It follows that for Balthasar humanity's deification is possible, but only "because of the *way* Christ descended into the natural and into what seems the most undivine of this nature: The

35. *FSO*, 356.

36. *FSO*, 357. This will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

37. *FSO*, 357.

38. *FSO*, 366. Italics mine.

ordinariness and flatness of poverty, the blindness of obedience amidst the thousand natural shocks of being a poor man of the flesh, and above all his abandonment, poor and pitiable, to cross, death and grave."[39]

Because believers share in the life of Christ through the Incarnation and incorporation into his Body, not only does God's way of kenosis provide the means of humanity's deification, but it also mandates the *way*: "the mystery of [humanity's] union with God and with God's nature takes place by joining in this descent of Christ into the world, cross and death"—a process which inherently involves "efforts to 'decrease' while the Lord 'increases.'"[40] Kenosis is not only the mode of God's salvific work; it is also the mode of humanity's participation in that work.

Continuity with the Patristic Tradition?

Given the above, one may raise the question: does Balthasar's theology flow within the venerated stream of patristic tradition, or is he creating an idiosyncratic tributary of thought? In "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves" he casts some severe criticisms in the direction of the Church Fathers, so it is worthwhile to briefly investigate their veracity in order to fairly assess the value of his contribution to our theme. One of his statements in particular seems to fly in the face of Church tradition:

> It is an all-too abbreviated and misleading formula that says: God descends that man might ascend. Just as it is an all-too short saying (that does not express what is decisively Christian) that says: God became man that man might become God. For first of all, what applies here is Paul's saying: *qui descendit, ipse est et qui ascendit* (The very one who descended also ascends). Man does not so much effect the counter-movement to Christ—even with grace. Rather, he is a Christian only in the exact imitation of Christ's movement.[41]

This succinct statement highlights Balthasar's understanding of the integral relationship between kenosis and *theosis*, and thus helps to illuminate one of his chief contributions to this theme by clarifying the difference between his theology of deification and that of the Greek Fathers (and hence the Byzantine tradition).

39. *FSO*, 389. Italics mine.
40. *FSO*, 389.
41. *FSO*, 361.

The first formula in the above quote regarding descending and ascending exemplifies the theology of Maximus the Confessor; the second is directly attributable to both Irenaeus and Athanasius. Both formulas comprise the very heart of Greek patristic and Byzantine teaching concerning deification. Hence, in calling the first "misleading" and the second not "decisively Christian" is Balthasar rejecting the very core of patristic teaching on this theme? The answer is both "yes" and "no." On the one hand he clearly believes that it is utterly necessary to qualify, if not re-word, these distinctive, classic tenets. On the other hand, Balthasar is correct in saying that these phrases need to be properly interpreted, for what could it possibly mean for finite man to "become God," particularly in an age where secular humanism promotes a Titanism apart from God? For Balthasar these formulas need to be "fleshed out" in a literal sense: they must be brought "down to earth," "humiliated" in the good sense of the word. For again, the "relation of radical difference" between God and the creature must be emphasized above else if the Christian meaning of deification is to be rightly understood.

At the heart of Balthasar's critique is his concern with Neoplatonic elements in the theology of the Fathers which insinuate a spirituality of ascent. As Deirdre Carabine rightly notes, it is "the Neoplatonic elements in the Fathers—which for them was by no means an uncritical acceptance of philosophical sources—which Balthasar ultimately finds problematic . . . his own adoption of certain Patristic themes is always qualified, always transformed so that (following the example of Maximus) any dubious Neoplatonic or Dionysian elements are filtered out."[42] This of course begs the question: does this "qualifying" and "filtering" go too far, revealing Balthasar's own (ironic) hubris in placing his own hermeneutical principles above those of the Fathers? His negative partiality concerning the language of ascent seems to go too far, for as the Church Fathers emphasize with one accord, Christ's descent was for the very purpose of his ascent "to the Father," and ultimately creation's ascent through Christ's recapitulation of the cosmos. Kenosis is clearly the mode of *theosis*, but most importantly *theosis* is the very aim of kenosis, something Balthasar seems reluctant to admit at times.

In fact, Balthasar's theology of deification consistently conveys a reversed emphasis: that descent is the reason for, and in fact the *raison d'être* of, ascent. Why? Because God is a kenotic being, thus becoming "like God" means becoming a kenotic being. Balthasar often seems to imply that kenosis *is theosis*, for descent—experiencing and living kenotic love—is not only the means of deification, but its end, since it characterizes the perfected cosmos as the reflection of God. Ascending to God means becoming a being

42. Carabine, "Fathers," 77.

who by nature *always descends*—i.e., creatures who have a kenotic nature. This explains Balthasar's consistent reticence to emphasize any language of "ascent" in his theology of deification because he believes it is intrinsically misleading. Thus, we come to the core principle that underlies Balthasar's theology of deification: it is *always, inherently about kenotic movement*—not only about God's descent in Christ, but also humanity's descent in creaturely humility and self-emptying for the sake of love.

It is Balthasar's strong conviction about this that provides his rationale for challenging and stretching the bounds of patristic thought on the subject. He does not stop with critiquing the traditional maxims of the Fathers, but goes on to make the provocative claim that the Platonic "schema of descent"—a conception of the three divine persons "as a kind of descending scale of potencies from the Godhead"—"was not all that far from the dogmatics of the Trinity, even in post-Nicene theology."[43] Furthermore, he suggests that the Byzantine liturgy also "possesses a Platonic background."[44] He consistently highlights his firm belief that any overly-Platonic schema of the God-creature relationship can too easily diminish the cognizance of humanity's creatureliness which, he continues to underscore, is the "first truth" of human existence and thus defines the relationship between God and humanity. For in all Gnostic schemas creation is considered a depotentialization of God, and thus growth in perfection (i.e., the path of deification) entails the shedding of the material and assuming the spiritual. Along the same lines, Balthasar also severely judges what he deems the Greek Fathers' "spiritualization" of the Christian life—that the world's movement into God is "away from the material to the spiritual."[45] Indeed, he even goes on to assert that this is "the basic tendency of the patristic epoch." In some ways, he could not assert a harsher critique, for this Neoplatonic tendency bears the very imprint of that which according to him drives us *away* from salvation: the denial of creatureliness that is the heart of original sin.

Balthasar continues in the essay to outline the "perils" of early monasticism—namely its "extreme" asceticism and individualism—directing his critique particularly at Maximus the Confessor who "in his ascesis and mysticism . . . relapses in many respects into a Monophysite-tinged spiritualism, thereby sealing the fate of the Byzantine Middle Ages to a large extent."[46] This is once again an exaggerated critique, given that both the East and West have always considered the early epoch of monasticism as praiseworthy—in

43. *FSO*, 373–74.
44. *FSO*, 376.
45. *FSO*, 376.
46. *FSO*, 376.

many ways as a Christian ideal.[47] Balthasar's negativity seems to reveal a prejudice regarding more ascetic forms of Christian spirituality: for him they are too closely associated with his characterization of original sin, which is about suppressing or rejecting human creatureliness for the sake of the "spiritual." His critique that the theology of the Greek Fathers and the eastern theological tradition in general is significantly tainted by Platonism and hence prone to serious error is almost certainly a significant reason behind his reticence to adopt the classic ideas and terminology of deification as discussed previously. For to Balthasar they are too loaded with overly spiritual, and hence misleading connotations.

Nevertheless, the foregoing criticisms are not exactly what they seem. Balthasar surprises the reader, for immediately after his almost polemical critique of Greek theology, he shifts gears (or rather, reverses gears), acknowledging that "in the preceding we have first painted a strongly negative picture."[48] Moving forward, he presents a far more positive picture, and attempts to elucidate how the theology of the Greek Fathers in fact *countered* the negative effects of Platonism. He does so by highlighting and lauding what he deems is the key characteristic of patristic thought:

> Over and again they emphasize and maintain the first basic cleft between God and creature. All 'divinization' is only a participation from grace and never a fusion of nature. Even so extreme a spiritualist and fanatic of unity like Evagrius Ponticus maintains this distinction, at least formally. The corrective of a feeling of worshipping distance and the sharp sense for what grace means is precisely what the great Church Fathers like Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Cyril and Dionysius gave to us for all time in so exemplary a way.[49]

This turnaround from the foregoing critique is not indecisiveness on Balthasar's part, but simply reveals his flair for drama in order to vividly convey his chief ongoing theological concern: to counter the primordial sin of false deification. Thus, as long as any conception of "deification" is not about rejecting creatureliness in an exaggerated spiritualism, as long as it refrains from speaking of some kind of "fusion" of human nature with divine nature, as long as it maintains the necessary "worshipping distance"

47. There is irony in Balthasar's critiques of monasticism and the Byzantine tradition, for it seems exceptionally in the simplicity and abandon of ascetic life, and the beauty and mysticism of the divine liturgy, that the "eternal otherness" of God is conveyed and where quiet awe in the ineffable God is nurtured.

48. *FSO*, 376.

49. *FSO*, 377.

(the "cleft"), then all is well. Consequently, Balthasar goes on to illustrate how it is the Greek Fathers who provide a critical *solution* by countering false ideas of deification:

> What works against the immediate tendency to divinize creation and man is an authentic Christian shyness before the ineffable God who dwells beyond all seeing and grasping, the knowledge of God's eternal otherness and thus of his overpowering and ever-greater darkness even in the midst of his light. No one has more clearly developed the foundational doctrines of negative theology than the three Greek Fathers: the two Gregorys and Dionysius.[50]

For Balthasar it is the sense of God's unutterable, "eternal otherness" that puts the whole concept of *theosis* into the right perspective. For it instills a wonder, humility—a "shyness" as Balthasar puts it—in the human soul. To put it another way, it promotes a healthy kenosis of the human spirit.

In the end, however, despite highlighting positive aspects of the theology of the Greek Fathers in "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," Balthasar seems more intent on differentiating it from his own. The variance is made abundantly clear in the following passage from the essay which outlines his conception of the basic movement of Christian faith and life:

> For the Fathers, love is a total transcending and *being drawn out of all being* that is merely relative and participative into the movement where God returns from the world to himself. For man to join with God to help to *complete the descending movement of the incarnation* wherein God turns to the world would have made no sense to the Fathers. For since creation and, even more so, the Fall have already brought us into this "below," this "distance from God," and since Christ in his incarnation has searched for us in this region "below," all that now matters is to link up with him and take the same way back to God as Christ took. The perfect Christian does this by gaining control over and ruling his passionate nature, by purifying himself (to the point of aiming for the ideal of a Christian indifference to the world: *apatheia*) and by contemplating the celestial mysteries of the New Eon (until finally he attains to the fullness of gnosis).[51]

It becomes clear that Balthasar presents the theology of the Fathers as a kind of foil in order to focus attention on his own kenotic theology of *theosis* in this article. He differentiates a Neoplatonic "ascent" mentality in

50. *FSO*, 377. Italics mine.

51. *FSO*, 395. Italics mine.

the patristic model of deification, where "control" and "rule" are the modes to life in God, with his model accenting the descent of kenosis. This characterization of patristic theology, however, while supportive of Balthasar's argument, cannot but appear to be an exaggerated stereotype. For it is more accurate to speak of the Fathers' conception of human existence not as "being drawn *out* of all being," but as "being drawn *through* all being" since the material cosmos is fully affirmed as the means to deification throughout their writings.[52] More importantly, it will soon become clear that the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor (a preeminent Greek Father) plays an indispensable role in Balthasar's theology of deification, providing him with the very tools necessary to construct a balanced and full exposition of the theme. It is Maximus who in an exceptional way not only charts the orthodox path between Nestorianism and Monophysitism but overcomes the spiritualizing tendency of Neoplatonism by grounding *theosis* in Christ's creaturely kenosis. Maximus's Christocentric theology, particularly dominant in his treatment of deification, is the vehicle by which Balthasar brings to fruition his conception of Christ as the concrete *analogia entis*, as we will discuss in the next chapter.

To summarize, Balthasar's discourse with the patristic tradition in the foregoing serves chiefly to underscore his position that growth in the divine life has far more to do with a "descending movement," immersing oneself in the concrete reality of human existence, than in self-purification or contemplation. This understanding gains even greater prominence in his later works, such as in *Heart of the World* where, while speaking of the *exitus* and *reditus* as inseparable in the rhythm of creation, he prioritizes the former, in contradistinction to Neoplatonic thought which focuses singularly on the "return" as salvific. He even goes so far as to assert that "perhaps the going forth from God is still more divine than the return home to God, since the greatest thing is not for us to know God and reflect this knowledge back to him as if we were gleaming mirrors, but for us to proclaim God as burning torches proclaim the light."[53] It will become increasing clear as we delve deeper into Balthasar's theology that in consistently stressing this "going forth" as the preeminent mode of Christian life, Balthasar often turns classical notions of deification on their head. The *reditus* is realized *in* the

52. Cf. Maximus the Confessor, who speaks of the *Logos* being signified in visible things—in the "logoi"—in order to instruct us in the divine mysteries: "For our sake He ineffably concealed Himself in the logoi of beings, and is obliquely signified in proportion to each visible thing, as if through certain letters, being whole in whole things while simultaneously remaining utterly complete and fully present, whole, and without diminishment in each particular thing" (Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties,* 63).

53. Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, 33–34.

exitus, for "becoming God" means participating in his divine nature, which Balthasar characterizes as kenotic outreach. Thus, he seems to envision deification as a kind of eternal *exitus*. The return to God is accomplished and fulfilled via plunging oneself in the drama of the world: "Go out into the furthest darkness! Take my love like lambs into the midst of wolves! . . . Go out; venture beyond the well-guarded fold!"[54]

54. Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, 34.

8

Jesus Christ as the Logic of the Cosmos

The mystery of the Incarnation of the Word contains within itself the power and meaning of all the puzzles and symbols of Scripture, as well as the substantial content of all visible and intelligible creatures.

—MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR[1]

Theosis can only be understood in the context of Christology—"the *sarkōsis* implies the *theopoiēsis*. For now the 'prototype' (the eternal Son, enjoying eternal Sonship of the Father) has indwelt the 'copy' and stamped his divine form upon it once and for all."[2] Christ has not only imprinted humanity with the "divine form," but, as Balthasar frequently highlights, he has incorporated himself into humanity. It is Christ's indwelling of humanity that makes possible humanity's dwelling in God: Christ "hallow[s] Man through himself, by becoming a sort of yeast for the whole lump."[3]

Thus, for Balthasar it is Christology that pre-eminently maintains the critical distinction between grace and nature which is necessary for any theology of deification. As he underscores, grace and nature "must be clearly

1. *KL*, 275. Balthasar is quoting from Maximus the Confessor, *Centuries on Knowledge* 1.66 (*PG* 90:1108ab).

2. *TD* IV, 380–81.

3. Nazianzus, *On God and Christ*, 111.

distinguished" in all discussions concerning humanity's union with God, despite the fact that it is a dualism that sometimes appears as theological quibbling.[4] Why? Because "nature is what God freely creates, *en ab alio*; however much grace it receives, it remains eternally *nondivine*."[5] He goes on to confirm this point by soliciting patristic teaching on *theosis*:

> Cyril of Jerusalem stresses that we are children of God, not by nature, but by adoption, that is, by grace. The "divinization" so extolled by the Greek Fathers is always the result of a grace that is rigorously distinguished from nature, a grace that elevates us to a "super-natural dignity" (*hyper physin axiōma*).[6]

When there is a failure to distinguish the two (as in Gnosticism), he argues that the "distinction between the ineradicable nondivinity of the creaturely 'image' and its vocation to participate in the divine prototype ('likeness')" is obliterated.[7] In other words, the *given* essence of the human person and his *gifted* telos (via grace) become problematically confused and humanity loses both its true identity and existential purpose. Since divinization occurs solely through grace, we cannot become "gods" through nature (i.e., by our own effort), and neither can we control or foresee what deification really means for us: "the creature . . . has no way—even at the level of speculation—of translating this offer [of infinite freedom] into the terms of its own finitude."[8] The inherent difference between God's being and ways, and ours, makes the deification process an inevitable mystery. As Balthasar insists, the maxim of the Fourth Council of the Lateran that "between creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them," directly "applies in its highest form to the creature's 'divinization' by the *lumen gloriae*."[9]

4. *TD* IV, 375.

5. *TD* IV, 374.

6. *TD* IV, 374–75. Yves Congar points out, however, that "the distinction between nature and supernature is much more clearly marked" in Catholic thought than in the East. While the two are "fundamentally convergent traditions," they have a difference of orientation on this matter. In the East grace is intrinsic to creation, and formal causality is the explanatory model regarding the relation of God and creation. In the West, "the explanation of reality is sought less in the order of formal causality and of similitude and participation than in the order of *efficient causality* and of genesis, of coming into existence" (Congar, *Dialogue between Christians*, 224). This issue partly explains why naturalism has been the erroneous tendency of the West, and monophysitism of the East.

7. *TD* IV, 380.

8. *TD* IV, 380.

9. Cf. *DS* 806; *TD* IV, 380.

Therefore, in Balthasar's understanding grace should not be conceived as an "added-on construction atop something that can be fulfilled on its own terms," i.e., through the scholastic concept of a *natura pura*.[10] On the contrary, he emphasizes that the "natural goal of man" cannot "be recognized by natural reason" and that the very hypothesis of a *natura pura* is even "superfluous and dangerous."[11] Rather, Balthasar conceives the grace/nature paradox as exemplified by an Aristotelian phrase found in Aquinas's *Summa*: "A being is all the more noble, the higher its end be toward which it strives by the definition of its essence, even if it can no longer reach this goal by its own powers."[12] This maxim portrays humanity in its most noble light, for its end is the highest possible—participation in divinity itself; yet this end is reached only via the sheer gift of God. What matters most to Balthasar on this topic is the "biblical consideration that God has determined from the first, in the freest act of his freedom, from before the foundations of the world, to order man to himself and to create nature *for the sake of grace*."[13] Grace is "built in" to creation as the outpouring of God's love and the only means to deification.[14]

10. *EXP* IV, 25.

11. *EXP* IV, 25–26.

12. *EXP* IV, 25–26. Balthasar is quoting *ST* I-II.5.5.2.

13. *EXP* IV, 26. Italics mine. It is worthwhile comparing Sergius Bulgakov's perspective that grace is "actualized" deification: "Grace is not something additional and adventitious. With the Incarnation and the Pentecost, it is Divine-humanity itself *in actu*, realized as deification in many forms and times. All the aspects of grace and the modes of its bestowal have as their sole purpose and content the elevation of creatures to deification, the imprinting of the image of divinity in the creaturely likeness." He goes on to critique the "two-storey" scholastic concept of *natura pura* where "the action of grace is directed not at the deification of human beings but at the correction and fulfillment of their nature. Only after such a correction is the path to their deification by grace opened. . . . [Thus] a second storey is added to the doctrine of grace. That is, the grace of creation is distinguished from the grace of deification: the gift of grace *during* the creation of man is distinguished as the condition for the gift of grace *after* his creation" (Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*, 296–98).

14. In the foregoing discussion, Balthasar frequently refers to the thought of Henri de Lubac, who in his well-known work *Le mystère du surnaturel* speaks of the order of nature having an "inner transcendence." De Lubac critiques any two-tiered conception of reality where "humanity is reduced to the level of a "natural being" who belongs essentially to this world, and its capacity for transcendence and entry into the sphere of the freedom and love of God is seen as a mere chance epiphenomenon: God's whole involvement for the world in Christ's incarnation, cross, and resurrection (in which, indeed, according to Eph 1:3–10 the creator's original design for the world is revealed) is virtually demoted as something superadded, to be dispensed with if necessary, and humanity is simply made more attentive to the satisfying of its needs and aims in this world" (Kehl and Löser, *Von Balthasar Reader*, 104).

As Balthasar affirms, we cannot even conceive of God, let alone relate to him, with our natural reason alone:

> The analogy of Being between God and the creature allows neither the comparison on the basis of a neutral middle term (the "concept of Being," which does not exist) nor the comparison on the basis of a formal proportion (such as that between "Being" [*Sein*] and "being" [*Wesen*]) that remains constant in both, nor such a derivation of the one (the creature) from the other (God) that the creature would come to stand in this attribution at a distance from the Creator that it could measure and determine, for that would mean that God's distance from the creature would also be somehow surveyable by the creature: the *maior dissimilitudo* always cuts through every possibility of comparison.[15]

It is only God's grace, incarnate in Christ himself, that brings us to knowledge of God and participation in his life. Jesus Christ is the ultimate revealer and mediator of God's grace, who leads us to relationship with the One who is "utterly Other, whose Being . . . is radically opposite to the conditioned Being of all creatures."[16]

Because Balthasar considers Christ as "explicitly the principle of world history and of creation in its entirety" he concludes that "from the perspective of theology . . . anthropology could be and ought to be treated as a function of Christology."[17] It is worthwhile exploring what Balthasar means by this, and how far he goes with this premise, for its ramifications in any theology of deification are obvious. In what way does humanity find its identity, purpose and destiny in Christ?

Since deification by definition is about becoming more and more like God, the key to understanding what it means for each human person necessarily lies in Jesus Christ, since he is the "icon" (εἰκὼν) of the invisible God (Col 1:15). Christ is the perfect image of God, God incarnate: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30); "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Given Christ's divine nature, however, it is difficult to fully identify with him and comprehend how we are to surpass our own limitations to acquire the likeness of God. The idea of imitating his perfection seems preposterous given our sinfulness, let alone ineptitude: the human spirit may be willing, but "the flesh is weak" (Matt 26:41). Balthasar's response is to assert that human identity is rooted in creatureliness far more than it is in our potential for deification:

15. *EXP* III, 41.
16. *EXP* III, 40.
17. *TD* II, 428.

> For biblical man the axiom of all axioms runs: I am not God . . . this basic formula cannot be overtaken by any subsequent development, no matter how conclusive it purports to be. This holds true even for such later developments as the theology of divinization (*theosis*) in the Greek Fathers.[18]

What takes priority in Balthasar's anthropology is not defining humanity by its capacity for perfection, but rather emphasizing that we are *humus*—of the earth—and that existence itself is due to the sheer grace of God. Any image of human glory is necessarily grounded in the image of human humility, of utter dependence on God.

The basic assertion that "I am not God" inevitably leads to the question "then what am I?" In an essay entitled "Who is Man?" Balthasar explores the nature of the human person and in doing so conveys essential elements of his theology of deification.[19] He begins by rhetorically asking the fundamental question of human life: "Why do I exist?" Providing the basic Christian answer—"because God loves and chooses me"—only raises the even more perplexing question about God's grace: "But how does God come to the point of placing so precarious a being before himself that, because of its mysterious imperfectability, can at most be a kind of scurrilous image and likeness of the One who dwells forever in the mystery of his unapproachable light in perfect harmony?"[20]

Although these basic existential questions are shrouded in mystery, Balthasar makes an attempt to address them by positing that "in the Absolute there is a counterweight of love that wills to transcend itself into the other."[21] He takes this poetic rationality even further as he continues: "And that other is not only God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, but even the night and the godforsakenness and the collapse into lostness."[22] God is conveyed here as kenotic—as one whose love leads him to "empty himself" for the sake of the other, even to the point of crucifixion and death. If humanity is indeed created in the *imago Dei*, then the question "who is man?" is inextricably tied to the question "who is God?" In this passage we are given a strong indicator that Balthasar's theology—and hence anthropology—is rooted in God's kenotic love and its inherent mystery. He concludes his essay "Who is Man?" by asserting that mystery and self-surrender define both God and man: "It is enough if the nobility of man, who must remain a

18. *EXP* IV, 29.
19. *EXP* IV, 15–28.
20. *EXP* IV, 27.
21. *EXP* IV, 27.
22. *EXP* IV, 27.

mystery to himself if he is to be God's image and likeness, shines through. It is enough if man can only glimpse in the dark absurdities of his existence that God, too, is happy only when he is surrendering himself."[23]

Imago Christi

The nobility of humanity is revealed fully and perfectly in God's self-revelation in Christ Jesus, for it is in and through him that humanity finds its identity, meaning and ultimate end in union with God. As St. Paul's letter to the Colossians attests:

> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. . . . For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15–16; 19–20)

Balthasar rightly emphasizes that it is relationship with God that defines human being: "The creature, in its identity as image, can be understood only through its origin from God and its consequent return to God."[24] Both "origin" *and* "return" must be emphasized as they are inseparable: Christ is Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:8; 21:6). Robert Louis Wilken, in *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought,* explains that since Christ is the "image of the invisible God," humanity's goal of "likeness" to God is necessarily modeled after him:

> According to Clement of Alexandria, 'image' "refers to what human beings received when created by God, 'likeness' refers to the goal, the end toward which our lives aspire. Human destiny is linked to its origin in God, and likeness with God is possible because we were made in the image of God. . . . To be "like God" is to be made over in the image of Christ.[25]

Balthasar affirms this basic teaching when, following the thought of Bonaventure and Ruysbroeck, he speaks of the goal of Christian life as a

23. *EXP* IV, 28.
24. *GL* VI, 88.
25. Wilken, *Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 58, 60.

"catching up" with God's idea of us—i.e., God's ideal of his creation.[26] This ideal is, of course, Christ himself, since the world "is designed and created in Christ" and thus "the pattern for this is the total self-surrender of Christ."[27]

Balthasar boldly affirms a foundational tenet of the patristic conception of deification that not only is the God-man Jesus Christ the mediator of creation, but that "all things could only be created with a view to their being perfected in the Second Adam."[28] (Referring again to the grace/nature conundrum, he qualifies this by adding that this does not mean "that God 'owes' it to natural man to raise him to the state of grace; God only 'owes' it to himself to be faithful to the order and consistency of his unitary world plan."[29]) This statement affirms his support of the belief that creation was *designed* to be deified—that deification is the goal and end of the created order—and that Christ himself is its template. Following the thought of Maximus, Balthasar asserts that "we find the authentic, primal archetype or idea of every human being in the incarnate, crucified and risen Son, who as such is the primal idea of God, mediating all creation."[30] Therefore, humanity is only made complete in Christ, a truth highlighted in Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*:

> The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.[31]

Anthropology since Christ's resurrection is therefore defined by human *destiny* even more than human origins; i.e., it is inherently teleologically-oriented. The hope of deification—that "we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2)—is an ontological reality connecting us with Christ which infinitely surpasses our earthly connection to Adam. As Balthasar affirms, "the Second, eternally superior to the first, has taken the latter's form into himself in order, not to destroy it, but to transfigure it through incorporation into his own heavenly form."[32] The *imago Dei*, which comprises the foundation of any Christian anthropology, can only be understood in its fullness when

26. Cf. the section entitled "Recourse to the Idea" (*TD* V, 385–94).
27. *TD* V, 391–92.
28. *TD* III, 257.
29. *TD* III, 257n75.
30. *TD* III, 258.
31. Paul VI, "Gaudium et Spes" 22.
32. *TD* V, 506.

it is combined with the teleological thrust of *theosis*, the fulfillment of that image in and through Christ. Hope and promise therefore characterize anthropology far more than bloodlines and history—and needless to say, humanity's fallen nature.[33]

In the third book of his *Theo-Drama* entitled *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, Balthasar goes beyond the assertion that Christ simply illuminates the "mystery of man" to make the more radical claim that it is only via participation in Christ that human beings are truly "persons" at all:

> It is when God addresses a conscious subject, tells him who he is and what he means to the eternal God of truth and shows him the purpose of his existence—that is, imparts a distinctive and divinely authorized mission—that we can say of a conscious subject that he is a "person." This is what happened, archetypically, in the case of Jesus Christ, when he was given his eternal "definition." . . . Thus Jesus is a person. Others can claim to be persons only in virtue of a relationship with him and in dependence on him.[34]

From a non-Christian perspective this statement would of course seem intolerable, for it implies that only Christians are real "persons," and hence the rest of the people on the planet have a deficiency of being. Aidan Nichols considers this facet of Balthasar's anthropology "most unusual," for although "the conscious subject knows he is human in a unique and incommunicable way, *quantitatively* different from all other conscious subjects, yet no fundamental ontology can show him that he is *qualitatively* different from all others—show him *who* he is, rather than *what* he is."[35]

Despite the seemingly radical (and offensive) nature of Balthasar's assertion, however, it simply reflects ontological truth. For if in fact humanity (indeed the entire cosmos) was created in, through and *for* the Logos of God, Jesus Christ, then we can only know what being "human" means—and indeed *become* fully human—through participating in his life. Of course, Balthasar is not speaking of the love God has for each human person, their inherent sacredness, or the sanctity of each human life. Rather, he is speaking of the fullness and completion of the human person as integrally joined to *the* "Person" who defines "personhood." Balthasar reiterates Christ's place

33. The fallenness of humanity cannot be the defining characteristic of human nature in the Christian context without both devaluing the goodness of God's creation and discounting the hope of deification. This will be discussed more fully in the "synergy" section of this work.

34. *TD* III, 207.

35. Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 104. For more on this issue, see Lösel, *Kreuzwege,* 164–66.

as archetype in his theological aesthetics when he declares that "in the Son, God gives us both the entire expression of himself and also the embodiment of our being, which is affirmed in its own particular nature."[36] Thus, he underscores throughout his work that it is in and through Christ that we are given our very being, "our own selves." In fact, paradoxically the person's union with Christ leads to his greater distinction; conformation to Christ results in the transformation into one's unique self.[37]

That deification of the human person involves being conformed to Christ inevitably leads to another question: what does it mean to know and live in Christ? John Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptor hominis* provides a helpful starting point for this facet of our discussion:

> Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This . . . is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself."[38]

The nature of love is revealed in Christ's kenotic incarnation and passion. Yet one can go much further than John Paul II here, for love is not only *revealed* through him, but *defined* by him: for through him all was created (John 1), all was redeemed, and all will be deified. Even more importantly from an anthropological perspective, love is defined *in* Christ—it is by coming to know him, participating in his very being through being a member of his Body, the Church, that we discover what love is, and are even *able* to truly love.

Discovering love and hence the meaning of our very selves through Christ does not simply mean learning things *about* him, but ultimately entails participating in the mystery of his life and passion. As *Gaudium et Spes* attests, "since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery."[39] This sentence is key in illuminating what the "mystery of man" is all about—not least because of what it affirms about humanity's vocation: that it is *divine*. (This breathtaking reality of *theosis* is too seldom mentioned in conciliar documents, and even here it is easily missed, since no amplification of the point is offered.) It is *because*

36. *GL* VII, 401.
37. This will be discussed more fully in the chapter on the Trinity.
38. John Paul II, "Redemptor Hominis" 10.
39. Paul VI, "Gaudium et Spes" 22.

the vocation of man is divine that it is necessarily, integrally rooted in the person of Christ who alone makes this miracle possible by uniting the human and divine natures and incorporating us into his very body mystically. Through being "associated with"—or better, "united with," or "partakers in"—Christ's paschal mystery, we share his kenotic suffering and death as well as his divine glory.[40] As Balthasar emphasizes,

> Our "life in transition" is not (the way it is in the religions) a longing for the Absolute or a flight from time, an ecstasy or a self-absorption or any other form of self-abstention, but is a life within the life of Jesus Christ who has taken upon himself, in a way no one else could, the responsibility for the whole of temporal existence and has persevered all the way to the Paschal Mystery.[41]

The words of St. Paul in his letter to the Roman church provide deeper insight into what this life "within" Christ means: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom 6:3–5). The New Testament exegete Joseph Fitzmeyr provides helpful illumination on the significance of this passage: "Paul's phrase is bold; he wants to bring out that the Christian is not merely identified with the "dying Christ," who has won victory over sin, but is *introduced into the very act* by which that victory is won . . . [Christians] actually experience a union with him."[42] He furthermore calls attention to the noun for "likeness" in verse five, referring to being "united with him in a death *like* his": "The noun homoiōma denotes not merely the abstract idea of "likeness," but the concrete image that is made to conform to something else."[43] Fitzmeyer highlights that unity with Christ is a true conformation to his death, according to St. Paul. Balthasar's understanding of humanity's incorporation into Christ echoes St. Paul and the exegesis of Fitzmeyer: it is "man's assimilation to the Son of God [in baptism and the Word of God] that divinizes him."[44] What this means existentially (let alone ontologically) will be developed

40. The Latin text of the Constitution uses the verb root *cōnsociō*, which conveys more than mere "association."

41. *EXP* IV, 464.

42. Fitzmeyr, *Romans*, 433–34. Italics mine.

43. Fitzmeyr, *Romans*, 435.

44. *TL* III, 187.

more fully as we explore the cosmic ramifications of Christ's kenosis, particularly in Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday.

The Incarnation and Divinization

This entire discussion regarding participation in Christ, and being formed through Christ, finds its ultimate premise in the mystery of the Incarnation, a theme to which we must now turn to more explicitly discern its foundational role in Balthasar's understanding of deification. Balthasar affirms the Greek patristic tradition which consistently maintains that it is in the Incarnation that the theology of *theosis* finds both its rationale and catalyst:

> We can speak concretely of *theosis* only in the context of Christology: it presupposes the no less mysterious possibility of the Incarnation of God. If we take seriously this mystery of God's descent into the form of his creature—this was the seminal intuition of the Greek Fathers—the *sarkōsis* implies the *theopoiēsis*.[45]

In a small subsection of his third volume of the *Theo-Logic* entitled "Divinization and Incorporation," Balthasar provides a (very) brief summary of the various teachings of the Fathers on this theme, affirming that the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hippolytus, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus (and Nyssa) all begin with the Incarnation as the precondition of divinization.[46] This patristic viewpoint is summarized succinctly by Norman Russell in *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*: "in Christ the created is united with the uncreated, and we in turn are related to the uncreated through Christ. The Incarnation is part of a larger economy that enables us to participate in the divine attributes of immortality and incorruption and attain the *telos* which had been intended for Adam."[47]

Following the thought of the Fathers, Balthasar affirms that the Incarnation is the "starting and center point of all Christian faith . . . [on which] the whole of theology stands or falls."[48] This is particularly so regarding humanity's partaking of the divine nature: "The divine nature being necessarily transcendent, the creature's participation in it can only be explained by

45. *TD* IV, 380–81. *Sarkōsis* is "enfleshment" and *theopoiēsis* is another patristic term for *theosis*.

46. *TL* III, 185–90.

47. Russell, *Deification,* 113. Russell's summary is expressed within the context of a discussion concerning St. Irenaeus's theology in particular.

48. *TL* II, 281.

taking as our starting point the hypostatic union of Christ. . . . His creaturely status is an expression and function of his eternal and uncreated sonship."[49] This is because Christ himself is the place where the divine and human meet, becoming one in his person. He is consubstantial (*homoousion*) not only with the Father and Holy Spirit, but with humanity.

The Council of Chalcedon (451) in particular, through confronting the Nestorian and Eutychian heresies, sought to highlight the integral relationship between heaven and earth by underscoring the unity of Christ's divine and human natures in the Incarnation.[50] According to the definition of that council, Christ is

> to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son.[51]

Because of this seemingly impossible unity between the eternal and temporal, divine and human in Jesus' very person, human destiny is forever transformed through immersion in divine destiny. It becomes possible not only to speak of friendship with God, or even being "children of God," but to speak of humanity's incorporation *into* God. Human existence is now defined by this reality; anthropology becomes irrevocably and integrally linked with Christology.

Balthasar concisely summarizes traditional Christology since the early Church as follows:

> The way to the mystery [of Christ's being] has been designated, since Ephesus and Chalcedon, by negative markers: it can only lie somewhere between Nestorius and Eutyches, between a theory of two persons and a theory of one nature. The goal was to avoid "division" (διαίρεσις) and "fusion" (συναίρεσις) with equal care.[52]

This Christological issue becomes a critical anthropological one in the theology of deification, yet in a different way since humanity will never *have* a

49. *WR*, 28.

50. Nestorius taught a loose unity of the two natures of Christ. Eutyches, on the other end of the spectrum, taught one combined nature, in effect denying Christ's true humanity.

51. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:62–63.

52. *CL*, 210. Balthasar is referring to Maximus's *Opuscula* (*PG* 91:88B).

divine nature as Christ has, but can only ever *partake* of it through grace. How can finite humanity be truly united with infinite divinity (avoiding division) without being utterly overwhelmed and hence absorbed or annihilated (avoiding fusion)? The formula of Chalcedon is thus inherently central in all discussions concerning deification.[53] Orthodox theologian Panayiotis Nellas clarifies this integral connection: "The struggle of the Fathers against the heresies had an anthropological side to it. It was a struggle to safeguard man's final goal and consequently his greatness. The Fathers never omitted, however, to stress that the content and the way of deification is union with Christ, because it is precisely this union with the Archetype which leads man to his fulfillment."[54] In like manner, Balthasar affirms that "the final key to this relationship of interaction [between heaven and earth] is to be found in Christology as it was summed up by Chalcedon in the terms 'unconfused and unseparated.'"[55] Thus, it seems certain that Balthasar would uphold Nellas's assertion that, "the real anthropological meaning of deification is Christification."[56]

The Athanasian Creed (*Quicumque Vult*), which came into use in the centuries following the Council of Chalcedon (primarily in the West), develops this theme further by emphasizing that "Although he is God and man, he is not divided, but is one Christ. He is united because God has taken humanity into himself; he does not transform deity into humanity."[57] This "taking in" of humanity into God in Christ is essential for explaining the mystery of deification, for the Incarnation ultimately involves not simply God's taking the body of the one man Jesus of Nazareth into himself, but *all* of humanity. On this point, Olivier Clément highlights an essential component of the Fathers' conception of deification: "for them the idea of 'human nature' . . . is not philosophical but mystical, and denotes the community of being common to all. . . . The whole of humanity 'forms, so to speak, a single living being.'"[58] This "single living being" is united in and through Christ, the second Adam; thus through the Incarnation, not only does Christ become one of us, but we are given the means through grace of becoming like God. As consubstantial with the Father, and consubstantial with humanity,

53. As Vladimir Lossky notes, "The Fathers of the 'Christological centuries,' though they formulated a dogma of Christ the God-Man, never lost sight of the question concerning *our* union with God" (Lossky, *Mystical Theology,* 154).

54. Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, 40.

55. *TD* V, 412.

56. Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, 39.

57. "Athanasian Creed" (*DS* 75–76).

58. Clément, *Christian Mysticism,* 46. The quote is from Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Orations* 32 (*PG* 45:80).

Christ is the embodiment of both God *and* humanity in the fullest sense of the word. He is both God's and humanity's self-communication and, furthermore, both the gift of God's grace to humanity from above, and the gift of a redeemed humanity to the Father from below. Because humanity is incorporated into Christ, it is given the means to be incorporated into the very life of the Trinity.

Quoting Karl Rahner, Balthasar highlights a central ramification of Christ's union with humanity—the radical affirmation of humanity and all of creation that the Incarnation implies:

> "If God himself becomes man and remains man for eternity . . . all theology remains anthropology for eternity" and "man is forbidden to think meanly of himself, because otherwise he would think meanly of God." For he must accept "that the finite itself has received an infinite depth, is no longer the opposite of the infinite, but is what the infinite itself has become in order to open for all finitude, of which it itself has become a part, a way out into the infinite, indeed, to make itself the way out, the door, whose existence means that God himself has become the reality of what is nothing."[59]

In Christ, finite creation has been granted a glory beyond imagining: through the Incarnation he has opened "for all finitude . . . a way out into the infinite." Human dignity has reached its height by now having the capacity to participate in the life of God himself. Yet what Balthasar focuses on immediately after this statement is even more striking, for he (with Karl Rahner) emphasizes that what the Incarnation reveals about God's nature, and hence the way he chooses to relate with the world, takes precedence even over its result, the glorification of creation. For the Incarnation reveals the motivational force behind God's descent to finitude—and hence also creation's ascent to the infinite. And this force is kenotic love: "It is not, then, the *assumptio* [assumption] that is primary, 'the primordial phenomenon is rather precisely the self-expropriation, the becoming, the *kenosis* and genesis of God himself.'"[60] This is an arresting statement, promoting a shift of focus from viewing the Incarnation principally as the means of humanity's redemption, towards how it reveals God's kenotic nature, which serves as the foundational paradigm for his relationship with creation, and hence the means to *theosis*. The revelation of the kenotic character of God is as central to Balthasar's conception of deification as the specific redemptive acts that make it possible.

59. *TL* II, 284.
60. *TL* II, 284.

Balthasar's study of the theology of Maximus the Confessor in *Cosmic Liturgy*—his most well-known and comprehensive work on the theology of the Church Fathers—is particularly helpful in highlighting key facets of his Christological model of deification.[61] While Maximus (ca. 580–662) is most well-known for shedding light on the doctrine of the two natures of Christ, particularly his human and divine wills, it is his "teaching on deification [which] represents the true climax of the patristic tradition,"[62] according to Russell. Balthasar characterizes Maximus as a synthesizer of theology, seeking unity between various strands of religious thought, for in his era "the time had come to set forth antiquity's conception of the universe in a final, conclusive synthesis. The time had come, too, to bring the doctrinal disputes about the being of the incarnate God, disputes that had torn the Church apart for centuries, to a final resolution."[63] It is through Maximus's resolution of Christological issues that key teachings about deification arise, for the mystery of the person of Christ is at the heart of the mystery of *theosis*.

Maximus's chief aim in his theology of deification, according to Balthasar, was to avoid any sense of fusion between the divine and human—in particular, to preserve the "metaphysical rights of humanity": "to prevent the creature, understood in its essential identity, from being overwhelmed and dazzled in this loving encounter with God, openly or implicitly, to such a degree that it is reduced merely to the level of an 'appearance.'"[64] In other words, Maximus's concern was to make sure that in explaining the relationship between the divine and created order, creatureliness is not utterly overcome, and thus deemed transitory and "unreal," fading into dissolution, as happens both in Asian religious thought and Gnostic heresies.[65] Because

61. As Charles Kannengiesser notes, "The one whom von Balthasar studied most thoroughly, among several generations of these Fathers, was unquestionably Maximus the Confessor. . . . One would readily surmise a secret collaboration between his modern interpreter and the inspired Byzantine monk of the seventh century, who so perfectly combines 'the glory of the Cross' in his tragic destiny and his spiritual achievement" (Kannengiesser, "Listening to the Fathers," 417–18).

62. Russell, *Deification,* 8. Maximus is a key figure not only in shaping Balthasar's theology of deification, but regarding the topic as a whole since, as Balthasar asserts, he is "*the* philosophical and theological thinker who stands between East and West . . . and 'East' means not simply Byzantium, nor 'West' simply Rome; 'East' really means Asia, and 'West' the whole Western world" (*CL*, 25).

63. *CL*, 65. Regarding Maximus's synthesis of theology, Balthasar explains that he compiled and interpreted the work of Gregory Nazianzus, Pseudo-Dionysius, Origen, and Evagrius. See *CL*, 35–36.

64. *CL*, 55.

65. *CL*, 44–56.

of this, Balthasar describes Maximus's theology as the "foundation stone of the Western Spirit," for it affirms the "indissoluble autonomy of the finite world . . . in relation to the infinite reality of God."[66] This affirmation is made possible and guaranteed in the very person of Christ, for "the most central mystery of Maximus's conception of the world, a mystery that holds within itself the solution of all the world's riddles [is] the unification of God and world, the eternal and the temporal, the infinite and the finite, in the hypostasis of a single being—the God who became man."[67]

For Maximus not only the meaning of *theosis*, but *all* doctrine is integrally related to the superlative act of the Incarnation.[68] As Balthasar explains: "the christological formula [of Chalcedon] expands, for Maximus, into a fundamental law of metaphysics . . . the formal structure of all created being, even the formal structure of the relationship between the absolute and the contingent."[69] Balthasar affirms this cosmic scope of the Incarnation in asserting that Christ's person as God-man is the very basis for God expressing himself in and through the world:

> If the cosmos as a whole has been created in the image of God that appears—in the First-Born of creation, through him and for him—and if this First-Born indwells the world as its Head through the Church, then in the last analysis the world is a "body" of God, who represents and expresses himself in this body, on the basis of the principle not of pantheistic but of hypostatic union.[70]

66. *CL*, 49.

67. *CL*, 235–36.

68. As Adam Cooper notes, this focus dignifies physicality and finitude as integral to salvation: "Maximus, at once faithful to the primary lines of tradition in the Greek Fathers as well as their creative interpreter, accords to the body—and thus to the historical, social, ecclesial and material cosmic orders—a definitive, constitutive place in God's creative, saving, and sanctifying economies" (Cooper, *Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified,* 251).

69. *CL*, 70. Nicholas Healy seems to give Balthasar too much credit when asserting that "the most characteristic and original aspect of Balthasar's understanding of 'the end' . . . [is] his thesis that creation is taken into the divine life by means of sharing in the one hypostatic union of Christ" (Healy, *Eschatology*, 188). This understanding is neither original nor "his thesis" since it is a patristic understanding of *theosis*, gathered and synthesized in the writings of St. Maximus and well attested in medieval Byzantine theology.

70. *GL* I, 679. The theology of Sergius Bulgakov is akin to Balthasar's on this issue: "The Incarnation is the interior basis of creation, its *final cause*. God did not create the world to hold it at a distance from him, at that insurmountable metaphysical distance that separates the Creator from the creation, but in order to surmount that distance and unite himself completely with the world; not only from the outside, as Creator, nor even

Given Maximus's cosmic understanding of the Incarnation, it is not surprising when Balthasar explains that for him "not redemption from sin, but the unification of the world in itself and with God is the ultimate motivating cause for the Incarnation and, as such, the first idea of the Creator, existing in advance of all creation."[71] This unification is commonly characterized by the Greek Fathers as a "wondrous exchange" (*kalén antistrophén*): "God is made man for the sake of man's divinization, and man is made divine because of God's becoming man. For the Logos of God, who is God, wills to work the mystery of his Incarnation always, and in all."[72] This classic maxim is evident in many forms in Balthasar's theology of deification, for example when in his *Theo-Drama* he emphasizes that "it is only by having a body that [Christ] can die the death of the sinner; accordingly, it is only because he has a body that he can put himself in the place of his sinful brothers or, rather, draw them into the sphere of his own nature, which is simultaneously divine, spiritual and physical."[73]

Needless to say, this ascent of humanity, and indeed all creation, into the sphere of divinity is made possible through God's descent, and it is this reciprocal movement of the created and Creator which characterizes Maximus's theology of deification, and in turn illuminates Balthasar's unique contribution to understanding *theosis* within the context of kenosis. Norman Russell summarizes this double movement highlighted throughout the theology of St. Maximus: "The divine Word who created us also effected our salvation. He descended in order that we might ascend. He emptied himself in order that we might be filled with divine glory. *Katabasis* is followed by *anabasis*, kenosis by theosis."[74] This understanding is directly paralleled in Balthasar's theology of deification, revealing the influence of Maximus's thought. However, for Balthasar kenosis is not simply *followed* by *theosis*, but is constitutive to its very meaning:

> For in Christ, God and man, God has opened himself to the world, and in this movement of descent has determined the course of every mode of ascent of man to him. Christ is the one and only criterion, given in the concrete, by which we measure the relations between God and man, grace and nature, faith and reason. . . . In every respect, [Christ's] humanity is fulfilled in

as providence, but from within: 'the Word became flesh'" (Louth, "Place of *Theosis*," 36).

71. *CL*, 272.

72. *TD* IV, 382, quoting *Ambigua* 7 (*PG* 91:1084BD).

73. *TD* II, 409. On the role of the body and deification, see Cooper, *Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified*.

74. Russell, *Deification*, 294.

> that it sees itself, with all its upward stirrings, brought into the service of God's revelation, into the downward movement of his grace and love.[75]

This "downward movement" is always front and center in Balthasar's theology of deification, as we have already seen, in contrast to the "twofold and contrary rhythm" of natural anthropology: the conception that "the body (nature) rises to spirit, and the spirit (which is the goal and rationale of 'evolution') descends into the body . . . [is] overlaid by a primacy of the descent" in Jesus' incarnation.[76] For Balthasar, Christ's descent is always the "path toward enfleshment . . . the implanting of the divine seed deep in the human field, so that . . . it should inform the whole substance; and finally, it is a movement that runs counter to all the sinful tendencies toward dis-incarnation, in which man would like to be 'like God.'"[77] In adhering to the patristic tradition synthesized by St. Maximus, and rejecting all forms of Gnosticism and Prometheanism, Balthasar fully affirms that it is not "spiritual ascent" or "dis-incarnation" that comprises the mode of *theosis*, but kenosis. Human fulfillment comes through the "downward movement" of God's love.

Continuing along these lines, Balthasar highlights the vital link between kenosis and *theosis* in Maximus's theology: with "ultimate daring . . . [Maximus] speaks of the divinization of man and the humanization of God as a *single process* in which each side heightens the other: the more man is divinized, the more God is humanized, and vice versa."[78] As we will see, this radical conception of the integral relationship between God's kenosis and humanity's *theosis* is particularly embraced by Balthasar in his theology of Holy Saturday, where he emphasizes that God's glory—and hence the very meaning of "glory," and the hope of *humanity's* glory—is revealed and realized in the utmost depths of God's kenosis.

Balthasar insists that Christ's kenosis is in fact the efficacious principle of the Incarnation, which "can institute what God intends *only* because it is carried and transmuted by the act of the kenotic readiness of the Son for the Father's will, the act that penetrates deeper than every created state and is the foundation of the whole existence of Jesus."[79] This "kenotic readiness" is not only the foundation, but "forms the unique *character* of Jesus'

75. *WR*, 25–26.

76. *TD* II, 411.

77. *TD* II, 411.

78. *TL* III, 188–89. Italics mine.

79. *GL* VII, 218. Balthasar adds in the next sentence that "Mary's *fiat* too, uttered vicariously for all and founding the Church as the bride of Christ, is empowered to institute this only by this kenotic *fiat* of the Son (in the 'pre-redemption' of Mary)."

existence."[80] By insisting that the efficacy of the Incarnation is rooted in the Son's disposition of kenosis, Balthasar expands the basic patristic foundation of *theosis* by focusing as much on Christ's self-giving character as his divine/human nature (i.e., the "hypostatic union") as the catalyst of deification. For while the act of the Incarnation makes humanity's *theosis* possible, it is the prior act of the Son's "kenotic readiness" that makes the Incarnation possible, and its continuing dynamism that brings to fruition the redemption of the cosmos. Hence kenosis is the primary "force" behind *theosis*. It is Christ's kenotic love that Balthasar refers to when he speaks of the "law of the Incarnation," which became "the measure and law of every love in this world, and after this our own love must be formed."[81]

However, it is not only Maximus's theology of the Incarnation that informs Balthasar's theology of deification, but his entire Christology, and particularly his understanding of the role of Christ's Passion. The highpoint of Maximus's Christology is reached in an illuminating passage from his *Centuries on Knowledge*, where he expounds how the advent of Christ is the key to comprehending all existence:

> The mystery of the Incarnation of the Word contains within itself the power and meaning of all the puzzles and symbols of Scripture, as well as the substantial content of all visible and intelligible creatures. Whoever understands the mystery of the Cross and the grave has grasped the essence (λόγος) of all the things mentioned; and whoever has been further initiated into the hidden meaning and power of the Resurrection knows the original (προηγουμένως) purpose for which God created the universe.[82]

Amplifying this passage, Balthasar strongly resonates with Maximus's thought, adopting his definition of the fundamental "cosmological law": that the person of Jesus Christ in all of his historical particularity is the center and Logos of all creation. In doing so, Balthasar goes a step further to assert that the Incarnation, "which means the descent into suffering, the Cross, and the grave and the resurrection of the creature who has been burned out in death and so has become transparent to God—is thus the final form of the world, the one that reshapes all other natural forms. Everything derives from this its decisive meaning and ultimate justification."[83]

80. *GL* VII, 221. Italics mine.

81. *KL*, 274.

82. *KL*, 275. Balthasar is quoting Maximus, *Centuries on Knowledge* 1.66 (*PG* 90:1108AB).

83. KL, 275.

In describing Christ's Passion—in particular the Paschal Mystery—as the "final form of the world," Balthasar directly implies that kenosis defines the very shape of deification. In other words, the content of his theology of deification must always be understood in its Christic form. He speaks about the need for all theology in general to make this essential connection: "our thinking should be continuously and deliberately subject to the Word of God [both flesh and scripture] not only in its content, but also in its form, in the very act of thought—which must, perforce, bear the mark of catholic logic . . . and it is impossible for theology to evade this form."[84] What is this form, this unique logic? It is the form of God's revelation in Christ, which is very different from "Platonist or Aristotelian" forms of thought.[85] In *Mysterium Paschale* he maintains that this form must ultimately be described as the scandal of Christ's kenosis on the Cross and in the grave, for "being a function of absolute love," Jesus' death has "the validity and the efficacious power of a principle."[86] Balthasar insists that this "logic" is not mere or sheer paradox, but is filled with comprehensible meaning and purpose, and adds, "of any other logic than this, the New Testament knows nothing."[87]

The Concrete Analogia Entis

All discussion of "cosmological laws" or "catholic logic" must therefore find its bearing in Christ *himself* as the divine Logos made flesh, the form of Truth itself. St. Maximus emphasizes that the "mystery of salvation" and the "mystery of Christ" are one and the same thing, since the former finds its very meaning in the incarnate Logos.[88] Robert Louis Wilken affirms this

84. *WR,*16. Aidan Nichols affirms Balthasar's emphasis on the kenotic process inherent in *fides quaerens intellectum*—that thought itself must "die" in order to be "raised" again: "The Christian message insists that thought cannot go beyond the limits of fallen humanity, of a fallen world, unless it undergoes a death and a resurrection. The 'death' in question is a discipline, an asceticism, provided for the human mind by ecclesial experience (worship, meditation on the Scriptures, prayer, religious love) all of which purify little by little the eye of the human intellect. The 'resurrection' involves the transformation of fallen reason into that understanding which mirrors the Word of God, in whose image and to whose likeness we were originally made. In this resurrection of the mind we rise into the life of the Holy Spirit" (Nichols, *Christendom Awake,* 50).

85. *WR,*16.

86. *MP*, 54.

87. *MP*, 54. Along these lines, John Paul II states that "reason cannot eliminate the mystery of love which the Cross represents, while the Cross can give to reason the ultimate answer which it seeks" (John Paul II, "Fides et Ratio" 23).

88. See especially Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 60 (*PG* 90:620–21).

critical point while explicating the theology of the early Church in *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*: after God became incarnate "one reasoned from Christ to other things, not from other things to Christ. In him was to be found the reason, the *logos*, the logic, if you will, that inheres in all things."[89] As described earlier, this fundamental orientation was at the heart of Barth's critique concerning the *analogia entis*—that it is a philosophy that seems to reason from natural theology to Christ—and served as an inspiration to Balthasar to develop Przywara's metaphysic into a more distinctly Christological form. In Balthasar's theology the form that reshapes all natural forms is Christ himself, who outlines, contours, and fills the life of the cosmos in his suffering, death and resurrection. Christ is thus not only the logic of deification—providing the concept with its rationale—but in his person comprises the very content and form of humanity's union with God.

Developing the thought of both the Fathers (particularly St. Maximus) and Przywara, Balthasar portrays Christ as the "concrete analogy of being."[90] He explains that the premise of the *analogia entis*—the paradoxical mystery that God is by definition omnipresent, infinite, immanent, yet at the same time creation has an existence outside of him as "other"—is encapsulated in the person of Christ. One aspect of this truth is that Christ simultaneously experiences existence inside and outside the Godhead: "The Son alone knows what it means to live in the Father, to rest in his bosom, to love him, to serve him, and he alone can know the full significance of being abandoned by him."[91] Furthermore, Christ is the concrete *analogia entis* because "he constitutes in himself, in the unity of his divine and human natures, the proportion of every interval between God and man. And this unity is his *person* in both natures."[92] Christ's very being "bridges the gap" between God and humanity because he has *become* humanity, "bound up with the world in the indissoluble bond of the hypostatic union."[93] Christ is therefore not only the "criterion" by which we understand the divine/human relationship, but is the very embodiment of that relationship—it is only "through, with and in him" that the relationship is even possible, and can reach its fruition in deification. The eternal and sublime has become finite and concrete, and Balthasar affirms that it is this embodiment of the Logos that is the means to union with God:

89. Wilken, *Spirit of Early Christian Thought,* 15. In this text, he is referring to the theology of Ignatius of Antioch, Maximus the Confessor, and Justin Martyr.

90. *TH*, 74n5.

91. *TH*, 65–66.

92. *TH*, 74n5.

93. *TH*, 74n5.

> The Christian knows, though often without fully realising it, that even now, after the resurrection, all access to the Father is through Christ, the mediator between God and man. He knows that the Son's human nature with its senses and faculties transfigured and glorified, raised by the Father to be Lord of the cosmos, is the medium through which the mystical body makes contact with God, now and for eternity.[94]

Furthermore, it is Christ's human nature that guarantees humanity's distinctiveness, avoiding any immolation of the non-divine in the presence of the divine. Balthasar insists that humanity's ultimate identity as "sons" transformed in God's image "cannot entail any alienation of man from himself, because in the Incarnation the eternal Word himself becomes earthly and because his 'Mystical Body,' the Church, comes into being in that exemplary identity which bridges the cosmic distinction between heaven and earth."[95] Jesus' taking on human flesh, existing in a creaturely state, assures the integrity of creatureliness, and hence uniqueness from God, for eternity. As David Schindler explains, in Balthasar's conception of the *analogia entis* "what is negative or imperfect in the creature on account of its finitude is not to be merely 'opposed' to God's (positive) perfection (for what can be opposed to the absolute?) but becomes rather, *in and because of its very finitude*, an image of the divine."[96] By placing Christ's creatureliness at the heart of his theology of deification, Balthasar expands traditional norms for its discussion in both the West and East, expressing the mystery not with the conceptions of "essence," "vision" or "energies," but within the context of tangible relationship. Deification is approached not as a notion to be philosophically analyzed, but rather as a living reality rooted in the concreteness of human experience.

This more existential approach leads Balthasar to move beyond the Church Fathers' primary focus on the Incarnation as the paradigm of deification and highlight the passion of the Cross as the means of guaranteeing this integrity of human personhood:

> Only in Christology is the otherness of the world's being and the being of man (over against God) encompassed as such in the otherness with God, so that Jesus' Cross can be interpreted as the effective encompassing of the human in God's life of love

94. Balthasar, *Prayer,* 218.

95. *TD* II, 291.

96. Schindler, *Dramatic Structure of Truth*, 49. Italics mine. For more on this theme, see Healy, *Eschatology*, 2.

> without letting the created essence of man become absorbed in God.[97]

The Cross is the ultimate symbol of the efficacy of God's kenotic love—that which draws all people to God (John 12:32)—yet Balthasar will emphasize that Christ's passion is most fully understood in the even greater kenosis of Jesus' experience of death itself. In Balthasar's theology of deification, Holy Saturday surpasses even Good Friday in revealing the "encompassing of the human in God's life of love."

97. Balthasar, *Epilogue,* 37.

9

Holy Saturday

The Lord has given us a sign "as deep as Sheol and as high as heaven," such as we should not have dared to hope for. How could we have expected to see a virgin with child, and to see in the Child a "God with us" (Isa 7:11, 14) who would descend into the depths of the earth to seek for the lost sheep, meaning the creature he had fashioned, and then ascend again to present to his Father this "man" thus regained?

—ST. IRENAEUS OF LYON[1]

For Balthasar, the heart of the Paschal Mystery is Holy Saturday, thus it is here that the nature and meaning of the "cosmological law" in Christ is uniquely and preeminently revealed. How is God revealed? "Just as a doctor is judged in his care for the sick, so God is revealed in his conduct with men," asserts Irenaeus.[2] This conduct reaches its most radical and scandalous extreme in Jesus' *descensus ad inferos* ("going to the dead"), revealing his loving nature in a way that nothing else can. Since Balthasar's Christology focuses on the concrete narrative of Christ's life as the primary revelation of God's inner-trinitarian love, far more than metaphysical issues surrounding his two natures, the event of Holy Saturday has preeminence in his work.[3]

1. Clément, *Christian Mysticism*, 16, quoting Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III.19.3.
2. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III.20.2–3.
3. As Aidan Nichols notes in his introduction to *Mysterium Paschale*: "Balthasar is

By revealing God's kenosis in a superlative way, it illumines the very nature and meaning of *theosis* in Balthasar's theology.

Before exploring the vital role this topic plays in Balthasar's theology of deification it is necessary to take a brief aside to discuss more fully the paradoxical nature of God's self-revelation as both revealed and hidden.[4] For it is on Holy Saturday in particular that God's nature is revealed *in* hiddenness. Furthermore, the role of "mystery" will become even more significant as we move more deeply into Balthasar's theology of the Cross, and eventually into his conception of inner-trinitarian life which is the ultimate source and end of his theology of deification. It is therefore important at this point to explore in greater detail the function of both cataphatic and apophatic approaches in Balthasar's theology.

Referring to the unfathomable depths of God's love in Christ's descent to the dead, Balthasar helps clarify the relationship between these two approaches to divine truth by referring to Anselm's dictum: *rationabiliter comprehendit incomprehensibile esse* (he comprehends with the reason that it cannot be comprehended).[5] Balthasar affirms that "both sides of this statement are to be taken with equal seriousness. '*Comprehendit*' denotes a genuine, understanding vision of the form of revelation: it becomes de facto clear that God has revealed his uttermost love for the world in Jesus Christ's abandonment by God."[6] Yet at the same time, this divine kenosis is beyond intellectual capacity:

> In the case of the mystery in the sphere of the revelation of grace, the accent lies on a positive incomprehensibility of God: it is ever more unfathomable, going beyond all understanding, that the absolute God, who is exalted above all opposites, should condescend to come down onto the level of his creature, indeed, more than this, to love it with such love and, indeed, to revere it in such a way that he takes on himself all the creature's guilt vis-à-vis himself, dies in pain, darkness and hellish abandonment by God for the creature.[7]

---

not especially concerned with the ontological make-up of Christ, with the hypostatic union and its implications, except insofar as these are directly involved in an account of the mysteries of the life," and particularly the mystery of his descent to the dead (*MP*, 6).

4. Balthasar's basic approach on this issue has already been addressed in the section entitled "Knowledge and Mystery."

5. Anselm, *Monologium,* 64.

6. *EXP* III, 42–43.

7. *EXP* III, 43.

Any theology of Holy Saturday thus uniquely requires an apophatic approach if it is to be understood in any meaningful way, since the very nature of the topic precludes any attempt at purely cataphatic reasoning. This also, as we have seen, applies to the theology of deification in general: whether one speaks of the *lumen gloriae* or "uncreated light," God as "*actus purus*" or distinguished in his essence and energies, all such concepts have an apophatic quality and are inherently limited in their capacity to explain God's deifying grace. God himself is both hidden and revealed, thus mystery characterizes the very nature of the subject.[8]

In his *Theo-Logic* Balthasar portrays union between God and humanity in this very context: "God shares his truth with creatures inasmuch as he makes his ever deeper mystery visible *as mystery*; and the creature shares its truth with God insofar as it acknowledges this mystery and gives it back to God."[9] Furthermore, in his theological aesthetics, while discussing the revelation of the Word "in the form of a slave" on the Cross (Phil 2), Balthasar expresses that the *intensification* of mystery is an integral aspect of coming to know God:

> God is incomprehensible, and the more he offers himself to our understanding mind, the more his incomprehensibility grows. *Comprehendit incomprehensibile esse* [He understands that it is incomprehensible]. This is true, no longer as a theorem of negative theology in general, but of the most concrete theology of all, which Paul calls the 'folly of God' in the Cross of Christ.[10]

Balthasar here speaks of a great paradox: that as knowledge of God increases, a kind of "kenosis of the intellect" must occur—the willingness to be receptive to the surprising, to acknowledge and even embrace obscurity and ignorance. He asserts that closer union with God increases one's sense of ignorance and awe: "It is an encounter with the incomprehensible, one which lies above all conceptual knowledge and becomes more intense the nearer the unfathomable approaches . . . fear, timidity and adoration grow with love."[11] This is particularly true concerning the revelation of God's kenotic love on Holy Saturday: in exploring this great mystery a greater sense of

8. Along these lines, Aristotle Papanikolaou provides a helpful correction to a common stereotype of apophaticism via commenting on the theology of Vladimir Lossky: "It is, thus, not accurate to say that cataphatic theology is simply about God's immanence while apophatic theology is simply about God's transcendence; each, always in relation to the other, is about the simultaneity of both God's immanence and transcendence, about God's ever-present presence and absence" (Papanikolaou, *Being with God,* 21).

9. *TL* I, 270.

10. *GL* VII, 318.

11. *KL*, 85–86.

God's incomprehensibility ensues, and with it a growth in adoration for his goodness and a realization that this is the mode in which *theosis* takes place.

Balthasar's theology of the *triduum mortis* in many ways would seem to have nothing to do with the glory of *theosis* in that it concerns the darkest, most inglorious aspect of human existence: the alienation and nothingness of death. Even more, it is about the death of God himself. Exploring the "wages of sin" realized in Christ's forsakenness in Sheol therefore seems antithetical to exploring the fullness and glory of eternal life in union with God. Nevertheless, Holy Saturday has everything to do with deification in Balthasar's theology, for the depths of death are what most fully illumine the heights of eternal life. In his thought, understanding the promise of glorification—the fullness of salvation—necessarily includes recognizing the destructive nature of sin and the curse of damnation.[12] As he makes clear in his chief work on the theme, *Mysterium Paschale*, it is through Christ's *descensus ad inferos* that God's glory is superlatively revealed and deification is made possible: "in this happening, not only is the world enabled by God to reach its goal . . . but God himself, in the moment of the world's very perdition, attains his own most authentic revelation . . . and glorification."[13] Because Christ is true God and true man, he fully expresses deified humanity and so reveals what it means to be "in the image and likeness" of God not only in his life, but also in his death. As Balthasar explains, he is the *ideal* of the creature: "Since the world is designed and created in Christ, our Idea is also 'in Christ.' . . . [He shows us] what our nature is meant to be."[14] This nature is elucidated in the following way: "The pattern for [our transformation] is the total self-surrender of Christ: those who are waiting to enter heaven contemplate this self-surrender and are transformed into it."[15] In Balthasar's theology it is in the darkness of death that the perfection of man as *imago Dei* is most fully illumined. While this emphasis on the connection between kenosis and glory may come across as extreme, it is important to

12. Balthasar is far from alone in highlighting this juxtaposition. To provide one example, the Orthodox theologian Archimandrite Sophrony writes: "We are naturally attracted to the All-Highest but our pilgrimage must start with a descent into the pit of hell. . . . And this is the way for us after the fall. In our consciousness we descend into hell, since the moment the image of Man eternal is revealed to us we become more sharply aware of our benighted state. . . . Brought low in sin, we see ourselves torn from God, and out of the depths we cry" (Sophrony, *His Life is Mine*, 78).

13. *MP,* 14. As Aidan Nichols notes in his introduction to *Mysterium Paschale*: "Because the Descent is the final point reached by the Kenosis, and the Kenosis is the supreme expression of the inner-Trinitarian love, the Christ of Holy Saturday is the consummate icon of what God is like" (*MP,* 7).

14. *TD* V, 391.

15. *TD* V, 392.

emphasize its continuity with the theology of the Fathers, particularly in St. Maximus's thought, as Balthasar describes:

> In the identity of divine annihilation and superhuman way of suffering, the unity of opposites takes place. For the kenosis of God is that 'infinite power' which is at the same time freedom and love. . . . This occurs without any loss of his own enduring freedom because this 'self-emptying for our sakes' is itself only the demonstration and revelation of an 'infinite majesty.' This place of God's self-emptying is the very place of his holiest divinity.[16]

Scripture attests to various expressions (or "levels") of God's kenosis beyond the Incarnation itself. In particular, the Christ-hymn of Philippians 2 attests to three: the "self-emptying" of the Word begins with the Incarnation, is made more radical and intense in Christ's suffering and death, and reaches its extremity in the fact that it is death "on a cross." Balthasar emphasizes two other expressions of God's kenosis: in the Word's "kenotic readiness" to the Father before the Incarnation even takes place, and its ultimate depth in Christ's descent to the dead.[17] As Edward Oakes rightly attests, for Balthasar "kenosis reaches its fullest expression and its most salvific efficacy in Christ's descent among the dead."[18] The *descensus ad inferos* is foundational in Balthasar's theology not simply because it is the expression of kenosis *par excellence*, but even more so because to him it reveals the very meaning of salvation:

> Indeed, it is for the sake of this day that the Son became man—as Tradition has shown us. One can, no doubt, say: he came to bear our sins on the Cross, to take up the account-sheet of our debt, and to triumph thereby over principalities and powers . . . but this "triumph" is realised in the cry of God-forsakenness in the darkness . . . in "drinking the cup" and "being baptised with the baptism" . . . which lead down to death and hell.[19]

This emphasis on the importance of Christ's descent to the dead cannot be considered a mere theological fancy of Balthasar. For example, it is affirmed in the theology of Irenaeus who asserts that "salvation lies in the

16. *KL*, 257. As already noted, the theology of Cyril of Alexandria also has a distinctive emphasis on the centrality of Christ's kenosis.

17. Balthasar also speaks of the *Father's* original kenosis, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

18. Oakes, "He Descended Into Hell," 237–38.

19. *MP*, 49.

human life and fate of Jesus, and this includes his real death; really dying, however, means going down to the realm of the dead, into Hades, and not just leaving the cross to return to the Father."[20] Additionally, Olivier Clément in *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* highlights the neglected truth that the doctrine of Holy Saturday is integrally connected to the gospel message, and hence essential to proclaim: "the only 'good news' which can possibly reach us today in our state of hopeless nihilism [is] the 'descent' of the God-made-man into death and hell so that he might triumph over death and hell in whatever shape they appear."[21] Because Sheol is where Christ's triumph is made complete in Balthasar's theology, it is ultimately not a place where death reigns, but rather the "deep cave from which the water of life escapes."[22]

The *triduum mortis* is nothing other than the fulcrum of salvation history to Balthasar, not only because it provides an integral continuity between the theophanies of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, but it uniquely reveals God's loving purpose to bring life and glory to all creation. For example, in an essay entitled "Some Points of Eschatology," Balthasar links Holy Saturday with the Church's doctrine of the "last things"—i.e., the "final condition of man and the world":

> The mystery of Holy Saturday is two things simultaneously: the utmost extremity of the *exinanitio* and the beginning of the *gloria* even before the resurrection. This was the view of the Fathers, as it is today the idea of redemption in the Eastern Church. Only with Christ's descent into the stagnation of sheol does there come into being, in the "beyond," something in the nature of a "way," a mode of access.[23]

Balthasar's point is clear: the "way," or "mode of access" to glory "comes into being" through Christ's going to the dead. The event of Christ's experience of death has cosmic dimensions: it is only through this utmost depth of Christ's kenosis that *theosis*—access to the *gloria* of divine life in the Trinity—becomes possible. This dynamic tension between the *exinanitio* and

20. *GL* II, 68–69. Balthasar is referring to Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* V.31.1.

21. Clément, *Christian Mysticism*, 10.

22. De Lubac, *Church,* 21.

23. *WR*, 157–58. This is reflected particularly in the thought of Maximus: "For if [Christ] has brought to completion his mystical work of becoming human, having become like us in every way save without sin (cf. Heb 4:15), and even descended into the lower regions of the earth where the tyranny of sin compelled humanity, then God will also completely fulfill the goal of his mystical work of deifying humanity in every respect, of course, short of an identity of essence with God; and he will assimilate humanity to himself and elevate us to a position above all the heavens" (Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery,* 116, quoting *Ad Thalassium* 22 [*PG* 90:320B]).

the *gloria* (Christ's self-emptying and exaltation), a recurrent theme in all of Balthasar's writing, reaches its peak and resolution in his theology of Holy Saturday.

Balthasar's theology on this theme is unique and not without controversy.[24] In asserting (along with St. Augustine) that the place Christ goes to is Sheol (or Hades), the realm of the dead in the Hebrew scriptures, and that he, moreover, goes to save not just the righteous but sinners, Balthasar goes beyond the classical teaching of Aquinas, who in his *Summa* provides three reasons why Christ descended to the dead: to bear our punishment, to free the just imprisoned by the devil, and to manifest his power.[25] Furthermore (and this may be his most controversial point), Balthasar interprets Jesus' kenosis in its ultimate extreme by stating that that he "went through an experience of forsakenness that took him far beyond Sheol and Gehenna."[26] His rationale for such a view is that the homage given to Christ in Philippians 2—that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow"—"is appropriate only for someone who has not only shared the general lot of mortals *but has undergone their fate*, including every possible remoteness and alienation from God."[27] Christ's kenosis is made complete only as he alone suffers the "most complete punishment," the *poena damni*, which is worse than the suffering he endured on the cross.[28] Balthasar's point is basic, and is a Christological one: since Christ is fully human, "in all things He had to be made like His brethren" (Heb 2:17) in order to reconcile the world to himself:

> If Jesus has suffered on the Cross the sin of the world to the very last truth of this sin-godforsakenness—then he must experience,

24. A more thorough description of his theology in this area is provided in Lefsrud, "From Dialectic to Dialogic."

25. A key facet of Balthasar's argument is that Hell and Sheol are very different places. Sheol is simply the realm of the dead, not the place of judgment that defines Hell. The dead of the visitation were located in Sheol, and Hell (as Christians now understand it) did not exist as a place of damnation until Christ, bearing the sins of the world, went there to destroy sin and death. Christ was thus the first to experience Hell. See chapter 4 of *MP* for a complete discussion. Aquinas's interpretation is in *ST* III.52. Furthermore, the Orthodox scholar Hilarion Alfeyev, following the teaching of many of the Eastern fathers, concurs with Balthasar on this point, asserting that "the preaching of Christ in hell was of good and joyful news of deliverance and salvation, not only for the righteous but also for the unrighteous. It was not preaching 'to condemn for unbelief and wickedness,' as it seemed to Thomas Aquinas. The entire text of the First Letter of St. Peter relating to the preaching of Christ in hell speaks against its understanding in terms of accusation and damnation" (Alfeyev, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell,* 213).

26. *TD* V, 256.

27. *TD* V, 257. Italics mine.

28. *MP*, 169–70. See *GL* VII, 232. This line of thought has parallels in Nicolas of Cusa and St. Bonaventure.

> in solidarity with the sinners who have gone to the underworld, their—ultimately hopeless—separation from God, otherwise he would not have known all the phases and conditions of what it means for man to be unredeemed yet awaiting redemption.[29]

In summarizing these key elements of his theology on the subject, it is important to note that where Balthasar stretches the tradition he does so with a worthy purpose: to emphasize the radical nature of Christ's kenosis and his intimate union with humanity in order to illuminate the depths of God's loving character and salvific purpose. This is not to assert, however, that his theological speculations are all fully orthodox; rather, that they should be given space in the Church's larger tradition as providing valuable (if qualified) insights into this inscrutable event.[30]

Nevertheless, given Balthasar's theological daring on this theme it is no surprise that his theology has been criticized, particularly by theologians established in the Thomist tradition. Most notably, Alyssa Lyra Pitstick particularly takes him to task in her work *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell*, where she outright rejects many of his key assertions, insisting that they not only stretch the bounds of Catholic Tradition, but contradict it.[31] Pitstick relies on the scholastic tradition (in both method and content) to delineate what she deems the correct theology of Christ's *descensus*:

> First, Christ descended in His soul united to His divine Person only to the limbo of the Fathers. Second, His power and authority were made known throughout all of hell, taken generically. Third, He thereby accomplished the two purposes of the Descent, which were "to liberate the just" by conferring on them the glory of heaven and "to proclaim His power." Finally, His descent was glorious, and Christ did not suffer the pain proper to any of the abodes of hell.[32]

29. *EXP* IV, 408.

30. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Fides et ratio* conveys a balanced approach, stating that within the context of right reason and reverence for tradition "it is necessary not to abandon the passion for ultimate truth, the eagerness to search for it or the audacity to forge new paths in the search. It is faith which stirs reason to move beyond all isolation and willingly to run risks so that it may attain whatever is beautiful, good and true" (John Paul II, "Fides et Ratio" 56). Although this statement is made in the context of philosophy, it is equally applicable to theology.

31. The Dominican scholar T. J. White also critiques Balthasar along similar lines, particularly in White, "Jesus' Cry on the Cross," 555–82.

32. Pitstick, *Light in Darkness,* 342. Pitstick's approach to Balthasar's theology seems problematic in its imposition of a restrictive, Neo-Scholastic regimen upon Balthasar's more expansive, patristic *modus operandi*. While Balthasar seeks to broaden and

Her emphasis is in many ways antithetical to Balthasar's in focusing not on Christ's kenosis, but his power; not on a mission to sinners but only to the just; not on the reality and ignominy of death, but on the glory of resurrection. Furthermore, her cataphatic approach distinctly differs from Balthasar's apophatic emphasis, yet still fails to provide definitive "answers" and indeed at times raises even more questions. For example, if Christ's descent to the dead is to be interpreted solely as resurrectional activity, in what way did he truly experience the condition of death as a human being?[33] Is this not a premature interpolation of the Easter event into Holy Saturday?[34] Furthermore, if his descent was solely "glorious," why does Aquinas himself intimate otherwise when he asserts that the first reason Christ descended into hell was to "bear the whole punishment of sin, so that thus he might wholly atone for the sin"?[35] On this particular facet of thought, it seems that there should be room in the Church's theological tradition for exploring and giving credence to the disruptive ramifications of the reality of death (let alone the death of the Son of God!). For example, the thought of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger is resonant with Balthasar when he depicts Holy Saturday as "the day of the 'death of God,' the day which expresses the unparalleled experience of our age, anticipating the fact that God is simply absent, that the grave hides him, that he no longer awakes, no longer speaks, so that one no longer needs to gainsay him but can simply overlook him."[36] If this portrayal in any way conveys what the Church seeks to communicate about the mystery of Holy Saturday, there can be no "neat," systematic account of this radical upheaval of thought and existence.

Therefore, it can be legitimately argued that the reality of Christ's death and descent to the dead necessarily lends itself not to benign, confident explanation but instead to the disruption of thought and hence *dis*articulation.[37]

---

deepen the tradition by providing new insights into the mystery, Pitstick's agenda is to confine it to a tradition within the Tradition, thus not surprisingly leading her to the conclusion that some of his teachings are "heretical."

33. "Could the Redeemer of humanity let himself be surpassed by men in the knowledge of human suffering? . . . Could he have only a moderate, average knowledge of human guilt and human pain, leaving others to go to the extremes? . . . Only now, having passed through the dark terrain, the chaos of human sin, has Jesus gained complete knowledge of man. Not only through charism and the experience of temptation: he has been exhausted by the knowledge of the terrible nature and pain of sin" (Balthasar, *Does Jesus Know Us,* 38).

34. Cf. *MP,* 180.

35. Aquinas, *Three Greatest Prayers*, 62.

36. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 224.

37. As Ratzinger rightly emphasizes: "The article about the Lord's descent into hell reminds us that not only God's speech but also his silence is part of the Christian

Regarding this doctrine the inquisitive intellect and/or troubled conscience should *not* be appeased. On this point Balthasar's intuition is correct: this most jarring, disturbing event of human (even *cosmic*) history must remain a gaping wound in Christian thought and life in order to rightly convey its truth.[38] The resurrection of course ultimately heals this wound, but its miraculous advent *cannot* be understood apart from Jesus' kenosis on the Cross *and* in his true, full experience of death.[39] For the victorious Lamb of God who at the end of time breaks open the seals before the throne of God appears as one "slain" (Rev 5:6). This is why Holy Saturday is the "fulcrum," the *unterfassung* of God's salvific activity in Balthasar's thought: it unites the two inseparable archetypes of kenosis and *theosis*, which only together convey the fullness of divine truth.

Christ's Unterfassung as the Mode of Deification

While Balthasar focuses on the impotence and passivity of Christ's kenosis, he concurrently emphasizes its paradoxical power—it is the means to a solidarity with sinners that has the potential to save. Although Balthasar holds onto the hope that all may be saved, he does not adhere to an Origenist conception of *apokatastasis* (i.e., universalism) in that he fully recognizes humanity's freedom to reject God, and God's respect for that freedom in refusing to overpower any person, even though such a tragic choice ultimately leads to separation from God and thus spiritual death.[40] Nevertheless, Balthasar maintains the hope of salvation even in the seemingly hopeless situation of Sheol because of the efficacy of the radical nature of Christ's *kenosis*:

---

revelation. God is not only the comprehensible word that comes to us; he is also the silent, inaccessible, uncomprehended and incomprehensible ground that eludes us" (Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 225).

38. From this perspective, Pitstick's charge that Balthasar's theology is unfaithful to tradition is unwarranted. For in giving full recognition to the radical and disruptive nature of the event he conveys the depth of God's love in arguably a *more* truth-filled way.

39. Cf. Johann-Baptist Metz on this theme: "We have too much Christology of Easter Sunday, and not enough Christology of Holy Saturday. The Christology of Easter Sunday has spoiled our prayers with a language of victory and made them give up their sensitivity to catastrophes. We need a sort of language of Holy Saturday, a Christology of Holy Saturday, a Christology based on weak categories, a Christology whose logos can still feel horror, and can change under the impact of this horror" (Frede-Wenger, "'Good' Friday after Auschwitz?," 142).

40. See Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*.

> It remains, however, to consider whether it still is not open to God to encounter the sinner who has turned away from him in the impotent form of the crucified brother who has been abandoned by God, and indeed in such a way that it becomes clear to the one who has turned away from God that: this one beside me who has been forsaken by God (like myself) has been abandoned by God for my sake. Now there can be no more talk of doing violence to freedom if God appears in the loneliness of the one who has chosen the total loneliness of living only for himself . . . and shows himself to be as the one who is still lonelier than the sinner.[41]

Christ's self-emptying even unto death is the chief means of appealing to sinners through loving solidarity, while honoring their freedom. It is the "impotent," "forsaken" form of Christ that for Balthasar is alone capable of reaching those who exist in the same wretched existence caused by the destructive forces of sin. Simple vulnerable presence is what, Balthasar believes, manifests the power of God (which is his love) in Sheol. Balthasar describes this solidarity with the dead as an act of "*unterfassung*," an embracing from underneath.[42] While an assertion of power from above would only drive the lost further into their lonely world, Jesus' kenosis allows God's love to come humbly from beneath their rejection to create the possibility for acceptance. Thus, for Balthasar it is when God is revealed as an "un-God," not in power and majesty, but in humility and forsakenness, that God's solidarity with humanity is most powerfully expressed.[43]

We begin to discern more clearly in what way kenosis is the keystone for Balthasar's theology of *theosis*. It is through his descent to the dead that

41. *EXP* IV, 456–57.

42. Similarly, St. Augustine conveys in his *Confessions* that the powerlessness of God in Christ *is* the power of the resurrection for those living in darkness and death, for Christ's servant form "brings down reliance on themselves, makes them weak as they look directly at the divine weakness, wearing the same 'leather skin' we do. They collapse helpless into the weak arms where power now surges to lift them on high" (Augustine, *Confessions*, 154).

43. This sentiment takes center stage in Lutheran theology. For example, Martin Luther asserts: "If [the unclothed, majestic God] should speak to me in his majesty, I would run away. . . . However, when he is clothed in the voice of a man and accommodates himself to our capacity to understand, I can approach him" (Luther, *Luther's Works*, 312–15). And a more recent excerpt from the theology of Jürgen Moltmann: "In so far as God is revealed in his opposite, he can be known by the godless and those who are abandoned by God, and it is this knowledge which brings them into correspondence with God and, as 1 John 3:2 says, enables them even to have the hope of being like God" (Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 27–28). For a more thorough discussion, see Lefsrud, "From Dialectic to Dialogic."

Christ becomes the measure of everything human in all its dimensions. Scripture attests that all "in heaven, on earth and *under the earth*" will bow before him (Phil 2:10). It is through the ultimate kenosis of Holy Saturday that Christ fully shares our humanity: not only does the "fullness of God" dwell in him, but now the fullness of humanity dwells in him, too, which "he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present [us] holy and blameless and above reproach before him" (Col 1:22). Jesus' descent to the dead is what completes and fulfills all possibilities for human deification: now Christ is the fullness of man by being completely united with humanity, and our union with him leads to our being filled with the gifts of his divinity.

Because of Christ's descent the divinization of humanity occurs not merely as an external gift but as an internal process. To re-direct the sinful human condition from the *inside* is at the heart of Balthasar's understanding of redemption, and expresses the kenotic means of deification: "thanks to his intimate experience of the world, as the Incarnate One who knows experientially every dimension of the world's being down to the abyss of Hell, God now becomes the measure of man."[44] God desires to not only be "among us," as in the Exodus, but to be "one of us," to know what it means to be a creature, to have true, close, communion with us so that our relationship is not hindered by the vast gulf between the spiritual and material, the eternal and temporal. In Sheol Christ becomes not only the measure, but the very form of man, by becoming the form of our union with God: "the One, whose name is Jesus Christ, must go down into the absolute contradiction of the glory of the Lord, into the night of abandonment by God and the formless chaos of Hell, so that, beyond everything that man can see as form, he may be and establish the imperishable and indivisible form which joins God and the world in the new and eternal covenant."[45]

Thus, for Balthasar, it is specifically the form of Christ as *man* that ultimately conveys the reality of eternal life. Jesus' going to the dead finalizes and completes the Incarnation, and hence his cosmically unitive role as the concrete *analogia entis*. Christ's form as the Logos achieves its fullness through his kenosis. As Balthasar asserts, Christ's kenotic obedience consummates the relationship between his divine and human natures, perfecting his very self as the eternal Word:

> Only the form that God gives to Jesus' increasing poverty and self-abandonment in the Passion and Resurrection, when Jesus submits his destiny to the Father, allows the Word that has

44. *MP,* 14.

45. *GL* VII, 14.

> disappeared into the flesh to become truly *the* Word that 'was in the beginning with God,' and that as the Alpha is now to be also the Omega-word that fills the creation (Eph 1:10).[46]

This claim is striking in its singular emphasis on kenosis as not only characterizing but *defining* the very Person of Christ in his cosmological, eternal dimensions. Although Balthasar does not in this passage tie this conviction to any discussion of humanity's deification, the implications are obvious. If Christ's submissive obedience, which leads to the most radical kenosis of experiencing the forsakenness of death itself, is that which perfects and completes his very Being as "the Word," then this must also indicate the path of humanity's perfection and completion as created in the *imago Dei*, and more particularly as members incorporated into his Body. In Balthasar's theology all of this is realized not simply through the Incarnation itself, but through Christ's living out the implications of human existence to their extremity even in death. Christ's kenosis in Sheol completes the *admirabile commercium*:

> By going all the way to the outermost alienation, God himself has proven to be the Almighty who also is able to safeguard his identity in nonidentity, his being-with-himself in being lost, his life in being dead. And so the Resurrection of Christ and of all who are saved by him can be seen as the inner consequence of his experience on Holy Saturday. There is no "reascent" after the descent; the way of love "to the end" (John 13:1) is itself love's self-glorification.[47]

Balthasar's emphasis on the tangible, finite, and embodied character of God's revelation in Christ's humanity therefore characterizes both Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday and his theology of divinization:

> in Christ the human is so completely subjected to the divine and made its vessel that it can be made a lasting expression of eternal life. Each word, movement, look and gesture of the Lord is a revelation of eternal life; but equally so is his suffering, his darkness, his dereliction, his descent into hell. All this is God making himself known to man.[48]

Yet God is not *only* "making himself known" to us in Christ's humanity: one can go further and say that God is "making man known to himself," since we come to know ourselves through knowing Christ. Christ reveals the nature

46. *GL* VII, 161.
47. *EXP* IV, 413.
48. *WR*, 43.

of eternal life through his person, and as such reveals to man what it means to be fully human—the kind of human beings God intended us to be from the beginning. Balthasar once again emphasizes that achieving this likeness of the divine is not about becoming more "spiritual," but about becoming more human: embracing the limits, frailty and dependence of creaturely existence.

Stretching the Boundaries of Tradition

Balthasar's single-minded focus on kenosis as defining the meaning of salvation and deification—not to mention God's nature—could lead one to perceive an exaggerated emphasis on a "theology of the cross" that leads to theological error. Elements of Alyssa Pitstick's critique are shared by others including John Milbank, who discerns not only a "Barthian outlook," but voluntarism in Balthasar's theology in this area: "[God's] appearance in our ambivalent drama seems to fall under a dialectical contradiction, as God becomes sin and death for the sake of our redemption. This tendency to reduce God's performance in our drama to the Lutheran adoption of a role *sub contrario*—as opposed to positive and ontologically continuous aspects of kenosis and transfiguration—seems to entail also the instrumentalization of beauty and a forgetting of the *analogia entis*."[49] In emphasizing the disruptive nature of the Holy Saturday event, there is no doubt that Balthasar highlights the paradoxical in what he considers a mystery that escapes analogy, exposing his conjectures to such critical appraisals. There is indeed some irony in the fact that Balthasar's frequent critiques concerning dialectical thought and the specter of nominalism (e.g., toward Barth, Neo-Scholasticism, and Palamas) are pointed towards him on this theme. That being said, his approach could also be reasonably interpreted as a constructive insistence on what is primary; a "getting to the heart" of the matter. For is it not God's kenotic love that is the *ratio decidendi* of all of scripture, a love that in fulfilling the covenant themes of sacrifice and forgiveness exceeds what is often deemed "proportional" or even "rational"? Does not this emphasis on the extremities of Jesus' Passion reveal a great truth: that there is an outrageousness—even a "madness"—to God's love for humanity and all creation? Catherine of Siena speaks of the unreasonableness of God's love in the following way: "O mad lover! It was not enough for you to take on our humanity, you had to die as well! Nor was death enough: you descended to

49. Milbank, *Suspended Middle*, 73.

the depths to summon our holy ancestors and fulfill your truth and mercy in them."[50]

Nevertheless, more needs to be said about how his stretching of the boundaries in his theology of Holy Saturday impacts his theology of deification. For example, although the Church Fathers often emphasized God's kenosis in Christ as an essential salvific theme, he not only adopts a more radical conception of kenosis in the context of Holy Saturday but incorporates it into his understanding of the inner-trinitarian relations. As Edward Oakes rightly notes, for Balthasar hell is "not just a Christological place but above all a moment in the life of the Trinity."[51] The trinitarian implications of Balthasar's theology are succinctly summarized by Aidan Nichols: it is Jesus *descensus* that incomparably "shows that the God revealed by the Redeemer is a Trinity. Only if the Spirit, as the *vinculum amoris* between Father and Son, can re-relate Father and Son in their estrangement in the Descent, can the unity of Revealed and Revealer be maintained. In this final humiliation of the *forma servi*, the glorious *forma Dei* shines forth via its lowest pitch of self-giving love."[52] Through Balthasar's trinitarian interpretation of Holy Saturday the very conception of *theosis* is given new, and more radical, meaning. A particularly noteworthy example of this occurs in the *Theo-Drama* where Balthasar asserts that

> the divine penetration of the creaturely went farther than the Fathers, with their idea of the *admirabile commercium*, were inclined to admit: even the sinner's alienation from God was taken into the Godhead, into the 'economic' distance between the Father and Son. This consideration alone gives completeness and sharpness to the notion that *theosis* is implicit in the Incarnation of the divine Word. Even before man, the image of God, sets forth to win a share in the gracious offer of freedom and divine life, God's absolute freedom has already plumbed the *regio* (*peccaminosae*) *dissimilitudinis* and penetrated the self-enclosed servitude of finite freedom: *ascendens in altum captivam duxit captivitatem: dedit dona hominibus* (Eph 4:8).[53]

In this passage *theosis* is more about God's "penetration of the creaturely" than creaturely participation with the divine and it is only possible because of Christ's complete kenosis—taking upon himself and within

50. Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue* 30.

51. Oakes, "He Descended into Hell," 232.

52. *MP*, 7.

53. *TD* IV, 381. The Latin phrase: "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."

himself everything that is human. Balthasar's kenotic "correction" of the patristic expression of deification is not surprising given his consistent critiques of what he considers are Gnostic and Platonic overtones inherent in the theme. Therefore, God's kenosis in Christ—reaching its peak in the extremity of death—is his chief "answer" to rectifying the situation, for it emphasizes God's gracious action, "the primacy of descent," not the "finite freedom . . . [of humanity's] self-enclosed servitude."[54] For human freedom, making possible man's participation is also a gift of grace and can never be deemed to "affect this achievement," but is only its precondition.[55] Thus, it is God's descent, his *penetration* of humanity to its darkest depths, that defines the meaning of *theosis* in Balthasar's thought, never humanity's efforts to "win the prize" of "becoming God." As such, his emphasis on kenosis is not ultimately a "theology of the cross," ending with the disjunctive paradox of God's hiddenness; rather, it serves to reveal the very means by which God's loving nature is made manifest and union with him is made possible.[56]

Balthasar takes his kenotic Christology to an extreme, however, in the above passage with his bold insertion of a rather idiosyncratic notion into traditional understandings of the trinitarian relations and divinization. That "even the sinner's alienation from God was taken into the Godhead" is a direct reference to his theology of Holy Saturday—specifically that since Christ took upon himself the entire sin of humanity (and its punishment, too), the ramifications of sin were therefore incorporated into God's very triune life. It is in this area of his theology that Balthasar particularly integrates the mystical writings of Adrienne von Speyr, who asserts that the divine Persons experienced a vast distance between themselves when Christ was in Sheol which paradoxically *engendered* their relational nearness: "The period of the mutual abandonment of Father and Son is the period in which the most secret mystery of their love is fulfilled. Their estrangement is a form of their supreme intimacy."[57] According to von Speyr (and affirmed

54. *TD* IV, 381.

55. *TD* IV, 380.

56. In a similar vein, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger stresses that Christian theology "must be first and foremost a theology of Resurrection. . . . It can be a theology of the Cross but only as and within the framework of a theology of Resurrection" (Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 83–84).

57. Von Speyr, *Word*, 61. By incorporating von Speyr's mysticism, particularly in his writings on Holy Saturday and inner-trinitarian theology, Balthasar sometimes stretches the limits of theological propriety. Aidan Nichols rightly comments: "It is consciousness of that practiced *betende Theologie*, 'theology on one's knees,' as well as confidence in the mystical insights suggested by Adrienne von Speyr, which excuses, if it does not wholly justify, the innovatory passages on the interrelation of Trinitarian theology and eschatology that make the final volume of the theological dramatics both

by Balthasar), inner-trinitarian union amidst alienation (indeed as a *consequence* of it) is possible via God's very nature as loving Persons in relationship. Specifically, it occurs through the Spirit, who personifies the bond of love between the Father and the Son.[58]

Despite Balthasar's worthwhile attempt to try to reconcile the reality of Christ's death with the integrity of the Trinity, his insistence that the "sinner's alienation" is incorporated into the Godhead raises challenging issues. For example, does this not seem to obscure the distinction between Christ's divine and human natures, transferring Christ's human experience of suffering into the divine life of the Trinity? This seems to contradict Chalcedonian theology, which regarding God's transcendence emphasizes that while God conditions creatures, the opposite cannot be implied.[59] As Gerard O'Hanlon notes, Balthasar's theology here seems to be an attempt to revise the traditional notion of God's immutability: "He is arguing that the incarnation and the cross are a real change of condition for God, a real humiliation in fact, not simply compatible with the divine form of glory as usually understood, but pointing to a kenotic event in God which can only be grasped as issuing from the sovereign liberty of the divine trinitarian life of love."[60] Furthermore, is it possible for God to experience alienation within Himself? This suggests not merely a relational distance between the Persons of the Trinity, but a disharmony, a "cleft" within God that defies God's Oneness.

This raises the question of the degree to which one can allow leeway for Balthasar's personalistic/mystical approach which often transgresses the boundaries of scholastic thought in order to convey the relational aspects of the trinitarian mystery. In his efforts to expand horizons of Christian thought he sometimes tends toward psychological speculation and hyperbole, causing him to arguably make some of the same mistakes he highlights in other theologies.[61] Consequently, there may well be good reasons why the

---

compelling and disturbing to read" (Nichols, *Say It Is Pentecost*, 212).

58. Oakes, "Internal Logic of Holy Saturday," 191.

59. As Aloys Grillmeier explains, "If the person of Christ is the highest mode of conjunction between God and man, God and the world, the Chalcedonian 'without confusion' and 'without separation' show the right mean between monism and dualism, the two extremes between which the history of christology also swings. The Chalcedonian unity of person in the distinction of the natures provides the dogmatic basis for the preservation of the divine transcendence, which must always be a feature of the Christian concept of God. But it also shows the possibility of a complete immanence of God in our history, an immanence on which the biblical doctrine of the economy of salvation rests" (Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 491).

60. O'Hanlon, *Immutability of God*, 15.

61. Guy Mansini paints a particularly grim picture of his theology here: "If

Fathers were not "inclined to admit" the kind of reasoning that Balthasar espouses in his theology of Holy Saturday, particularly in passages like the above. On the other hand, one could contend that Balthasar's theology of the concrete *analogia entis* adequately addresses Milbank's concerns by emphasizing that the "ontological difference" is not only maintained but accentuated on the basis of God's very kenotic nature as revealed in Christ. D. C. Schindler explains how the above critiques are assuaged via Balthasar's analogous understanding of the God-world relation:

> A "dialectical" relationship would posit the world as simply negativity in relation to the simple positivity of God, and it would then attempt to mediate this simple difference by simply *negating* this simple negativity of the creature and thus building a complex (pseudo-) analogy between God's positivity and the world's non-negativity. Balthasar's "analogia entis," by contrast, begins with God, not as a simple positivity but as an absolute poor-wealth, in relation to the relative rich-poverty of the creature. In this case, the difference between God and creature is not compromised by similarity, but rather it paradoxically increases directly with similarity.[62]

Balthasar's portrayal of God as "an absolute poor-wealth"—the foundation of his conception of the concrete *analogia entis*—is grounded in his understanding of Holy Saturday as the preeminent revelation of God's kenotic nature and mission, once again illustrating how it permeates and defines his entire theological vision. Is the "greater difference" between God and creation "forgotten" in Balthasar's conception of God as assimilating the alienation and suffering of Christ, as Milbank argues, or conversely brought to the forefront and "increased" via Balthasar's characterization of God through the lens of Christ's descent? While Balthasar himself admits that there can be no conclusive "answer" to such mysteries,[63] it is possible

Balthasar moves from Christ's representation of us in bearing sin and the experienced alienation of the sinner from God, to Christ's bearing the wrath of God, to the Cross as inner-trinitarian event, to the mutability of God, and if this conclusion is to be rejected, where is he to be stopped? . . . If we do not stop him somewhere, we end up imputing a change to God that either destroys the divine transcendence, and thence the doctrine of creation itself, or that threatens theological discourse with incoherence" (Mansini, "Rahner and Balthasar," 247–48).

62. Schindler, *Dramatic Structure of Truth*, 48–49.

63. Regarding the issue of God's immutability, O'Hanlon notes that "there is no claim in Balthasar to have definitively solved the problem. Rather, he rejects the notion of a definitive solution altogether, stressing the intrinsically mysterious nature of the issue and acknowledging this in part by his linguistic usage" (O'Hanlon, *Immutability of God*, 18).

to more fully assess the cogency of his claims by exploring his theology of the Trinity, particularly in his understanding of the correlation between the polarities of unity and difference, intimacy and distance in the inner-trinitarian relations. Before advancing to that discussion in the next chapter, however, the integral relationship between Balthasar's conception of kenosis and "glory" must be highlighted in order to more fully appreciate the ramifications of his theology of Holy Saturday on his understanding of deification.

Kenotic Glory

Holy Saturday, which in many ways encompasses the darkest themes of human existence—death, alienation, judgment, and loss of meaning—seems in many ways to refute both the glory of God and humanity. By all outward appearances, there is only ugliness, nothingness and despair in death. Yet Balthasar assiduously conveys the Christian truth that the inner reality of the event shatters the existential negatives in and through the negatives themselves: Christ "tramples death by death."[64] Christ's kenosis on Holy Saturday is the superlative revelation of God's glory in Balthasar's theology: "it is precisely the 'powerfulness' in the *doxa* of God that shines forth from the complete powerlessness" of Jesus Christ.[65] More specifically, he asserts that "Glory is eternal love descending into the uttermost darkness."[66] It is this kenotic form of glory that typifies his theology of deification.

"Glory" (δόξα) is the overarching theme of Balthasar's seven volume series on theological aesthetics—*Herrlichkeit* (*The Glory of the Lord*)—whose premise is that glory is a "transcendental" which permeates every aspect of the divine revelation. This glory, revealed superlatively in the fullness of this revelation in the Word Incarnate, is for Balthasar no purely aesthetic matter: "the glorification of Christ is at the deepest level a question of the *truth* of Christianity."[67] The very conception of glory receives its meaning and is transformed in Christ:

> What God's glory in its good truth is, was to be revealed in Jesus Christ, and ultimately in his absolute obedience of Cross and Hell. The unique ray of the divine majesty of love is to become visible from the unique momentum of this event, establishing

64. This moving phrase is repeated throughout the Pascha liturgy of the Byzantine rite.

65. *GL* VII, 244.

66. *GL* VII, 85.

67. *GL* VII, 261.

> the norm for everything that can lay claim to the predicate "glorious," at whatever distance and periphery it may be.[68]

In Balthasar's thought, therefore, how "glory" is understood is vital for not only theology in general, but particularly for the notion of deification, which is all about the glorification of humanity, and consequently all creation. In discussing Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament—as the synthesis of the hoped for 'Messiah' and 'Son of God'—Balthasar emphasizes that Christ, in revealing the true and full meaning of "glory" has not only changed our conception of God, but also of humanity: "But who could have had an inkling that, by bringing himself as newness, he would make a breakthrough to a wholly new image of God—to its true glory, of which the *kabod* of old was only a shadowy prefiguring—and to a whole new image of man—and the gleam of glory of old (Ps 8) was likewise only a 'reflection of the coming' image of man?"[69] Balthasar summarizes the first volume of his theological aesthetics by asserting that this "new image" of God and man is realized preeminently in Christ's experience of death on Holy Saturday; for God's glory "reveals and authenticates itself definitively precisely in its own apparent antithesis (in the *kenosis* of the descent into hell) as love selflessly serving out of love. Thus *The Glory of the Lord* points not only to the proper center of theology but also to the heart of the individual's existential situation."[70]

All explications of the meaning of 'glory' in relation to deification require a discussion of Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor, particularly given its central role in the Byzantine theology of *theosis*. It was a controversy regarding the spiritual experience of the "uncreated light" of the Transfiguration that led to the doctrinal distinction between God's essence and energies in Orthodox theology. That tradition emphasizes the revelatory nature of the Taboric light and the real possibility of spiritual (and even physical) transformation in and through the divine energies, as Gregory Palamas explains:

> He who participates in the divine energy, himself becomes, to some extent, light; he is united to the light, and by that light he sees in full awareness all that remains hidden to those who have not this grace; thus, he transcends not only the bodily senses, but also all that can be known by the intellect . . . for the pure in

68. *GL* VII, 243.

69. *GL* VII, 89.

70. Balthasar, *My Work*, 81.

> heart see God . . . who, being Light, dwells in them and reveals Himself to those who love Him, to His beloved.[71]

This mystical understanding is significantly different from typical Catholic conceptions of the Transfiguration, including Balthasar's, which, although recognizing the spiritual power of the event, tend to minimize its existential significance for humanity, emphasizing instead the story's uniqueness as applied to Christ as well as the hiddenness of his glory.[72] Balthasar's kenotic hermeneutic is particularly evident in the way he interprets the account, for the transfiguration testifies less to the *doxa* of the Old Testament than to the elusive nature of Jesus' glory. For even though there is dazzling light, shining garments, a heavenly voice and the appearance of Moses and Elijah, Balthasar chooses to emphasize that the experience "takes place in deepest concealment . . . far from men, before three witness who are half asleep and who must seal up in strict silence what they have seen."[73]

Furthermore, he accentuates the integral link between the Transfiguration and the Passion, focusing on the Lukan account, which speaks of Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus about his "exodus": "the cloud of the *kabod* . . . is a darkness that bears a coming night in its womb, since it is the same three disciples who will be witnesses on the Mount of Olives of the object of the conversation on the mountains of transfiguration."[74] Balthasar further affirms the vital, inherent link between Christ's kenosis and glory in commenting on how the Gospel of John conveys the event. For St. John,

> Jesus' whole life and death are one "transfiguration," that is, the love of God glorifying itself. To the eyes of John's faith and love it is precisely God's humiliation which appears as his exaltation: in the erection of the Cross he sees the implanting of God's sign of victory over the world. Even the Pauline opposition between *kenosis* and exaltation because of the obedience on the Cross is surpassed in John by an indissoluble unity: John's "going up" is

71. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 224, quoting Palamas's "Homily on the Presentation of the Holy Virgin in the Temple."

72. For example, Aquinas in the *Summa* focuses on the fact that Jesus' glory did not overflow throughout his life because he needed a body like ours, with its limitations and defects, to fulfill the plan of redemption (*ST* III.45.2). He provides three arguments for this proposition: first, being fully human means taking on our defects as the punishment for sin; second, bearing that burden of human defects provided an example of patience to us; thirdly, if he had not done so, he would not have seemed to be human, but imaginary, and thus we would not have believed in the incarnation (*ST* III.14.1).

73. *GL* VII, 347

74. *GL* VII, 345.

> but the rendering visible of a dimension of the event which had been present all along.[75]

Christ's kenosis and transfiguration are therefore inseparable in Balthasar's thought, and the ramifications are obvious: the kenotic glory of Christ must be the basis for any understanding of what any experience of the "light of Tabor" is all about.

Despite his strong emphasis on the hiddenness of the affair, Balthasar does not fail to likewise affirm (following the Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov) the character of the Transfiguration as a visible sign of the hope of deification: "The transfiguration of the earthly Jesus, of his earthly clothes and in some manner of the world upon which he shines, is the promise and first instalment of the eschatological transformation of the world as a whole, and for Paul this truly begins with the living of the Christian life—as a reflection of the glory of Christ—in a way that is both invisible and visible (2 Cor 3)."[76] Yet of course this transformation always remains in and through "the glory of Christ," which is rooted in his Passion. Commenting on Jesus' sharing the glory of the Father expressed in the Christ-hymn of Philippians 2, Balthasar speaks of his kenosis as the *sine qua non* of his exaltation: "it is not this δόξα, however, which is of course presupposed, that the hymn wishes to glorify, but the thing that was inconceivable in the Old Testament, the reason for his exaltation—his opening-up of the empty space through which the δόξα can send its rays."[77] The "empty space" Balthasar is referring to is "the space of complete poverty, indeed more than this, of full abandonment of self, which holds itself open for this new splendour and glory alone."[78]

Given that Christ's exaltation takes place in and through his Passion, his kenotic glory has strong eschatological implications. Christ's *kenosis* is not simply a temporary mode of existence to accomplish humanity's redemption, but characterizes his being and has been integrated into the divine nature for eternity: "Christ's death—glorified and transfigured and made eternal in the wounds of the Risen One—remains an inextinguishable moment within his eternal life from the beginning. Now that he has returned to the Father, Omega can no longer be distinguished from Alpha, for the living Lamb is 'being slaughtered since the beginning of the world' (Rev 13:8)."[79] Consequently, it is Christ's wounds—his suffering unto

75. *GL* I, 672.
76. *GL* VII, 347.
77. *GL* VII, 147.
78. *GL* VII, 147.
79. *EXP* IV, 438. Dumitru Staniloae goes one step further in emphasizing that

death itself—that not only characterize his Person but are the very means by which believers are united with him: "In its wounds the body of Christ becomes the freely available habitation of the believers incorporated into it. The wounds are not healed and closed up, but are transfigured and remain open."[80] Christ's suffering and death are the very means by which humanity has access into divine life:

> We enter into the inner being of God through the wounded side of the Father's Son and Word. His whole life with his death was his self-revelation and self-giving to us, and it alone can teach us that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of love; there we are shown the extreme of self-giving, and there the Son proves his love in the outpouring of his blood, the immolation of his flesh.[81]

In the book of Revelation Christ the slain Lamb receives glory and power as the apocalyptic judge of all humanity, yet Balthasar asserts that "the usual image of the Judge in his glory is broken through and transcended" for "the Judge appears as a figure of power (Rev 1:12–16), which, however, includes within itself his powerlessness, not as a part of his past that can now be forgotten, but as the constant presupposition of his authority. . . . To have experienced all forms of sin and abandonment in his own body gives him the highest competence as Judge."[82] Since Christ embodies the meaning of divine "glory" and "power" as the slain Lamb and kenotic judge, the entire cosmos created in and through him is ultimately permeated and defined by it. The glory of God given to humanity before the Fall is indeed restored at the end of time, but it is refashioned through Christ:

> Although man was originally created in the image of God, it was not his own quality of being an image that he lost through his sin, but the glory of God (Rom 3:23), and that he is reintroduced through Christ, who becomes God's "image" and "glory," not into an original glory of the human person as such, but—through the continuous transcendental relationship to Christ—into a far higher "quality of being an image" and "glory" (2 Cor 3:18), that of God in Christ.[83]

Christ's kenotic presence also has a transformative purpose for humanity: "although Christ dies no more as he did once on earth, he nevertheless permanently retains his sacrificial disposition of total surrender to the Father in order to draw all men into this same disposition" (Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 196–97).

80. Balthasar, *Does Jesus Know Us?*, 51.

81. Balthasar, *Prayer*, 56.

82. *EXP* IV, 449.

83. *EXP* IV, 296–97.

Achieving the "likeness" of God in Balthasar's thought is therefore about being integrated into Christ's "higher" glory which is kenotic in nature. Since God's very "divine form" has been "stamped" upon humanity through the Incarnation, man's ultimate end—*theosis*—necessarily involves taking on the character of Christ's kenotic glory.[84] The *imago Dei* becomes the *imago Christi* in the new covenant; deification means Christification.

84. Cf. *TD* III, 381.

10

In the Image of the Trinity

It is precisely in this infinite surrender and self-renunciation, in this absolute preference of the Thou to the I, that the life of the Trinity consists; for it is a life in which the Persons can be conceived only 'relatively,' that is, through one another.[1]

While Balthasar's theology of deification is rightly characterized as Christocentric, its fullness and completion are only realized in a trinitarian way. As he affirms, "the Trinity, and not Christology, is the last horizon of the revelation of God in himself and in his dramatic relationship with the world."[2] Yet it is Christ who reveals the Trinity as its living analogy: he is "the divine 'effulgence' and as such expresses the entire life of the Trinity."[3] As the concrete *analogia entis*—the "measure of the likeness and ever greater unlikeness" between God and creation—he is consequently "the measure of Trinitarian being itself, which both expresses and grounds likeness and unlikeness."[4] In the *Theo-Logic* Balthasar speaks of "the Son's 'economic' death as the revelation, in terms of the world, of the *kenosis* (or selflessness) of the love of Father and Son at the heart of the Trinity."[5] Christ is truly the concrete *analogia entis* by being both infinite and finite, existing both

1. *WR*, 34.
2. *TD* V, 56.
3. *TD* V, 75.
4. Johnson, *Christ and Analogy*, 144.
5. *TL* III, 300.

within and outside of God as fully divine and fully human, and thus overcoming the inherent "cleft" between creation and the Creator which makes possible humanity's union with God. Yet the "analogy of being" is inherently an "analogy of relationship," for being itself can only be fully defined and understood in and through the context of relationship, thus any attempt at elucidating the union of divinization inexorably moves toward a trinitarian resolution.

In Balthasar's theology it is superlatively through Christ that we are introduced into the life of the Trinity: "the revelation of God that takes place in Jesus Christ is primarily a trinitarian one: Jesus does not speak about God in general but shows us the Father and gives us the Holy Spirit."[6] In this, Balthasar affirms not only scriptural teaching (e.g., John 12:45; 14:9; 2 Pet 1:4), but also the patristic and scholastic traditions.[7] It is through being conformed to and immersed in the life of Christ that we become partakers in the trinitarian divine nature: "beholding and inwardly participating in the Son in his eucharistic self-giving becomes a beholding and a participating in the life of the Trinity."[8] While *theosis* is gifted through incorporation into the Son, its goal is incorporation into the very life of all three Persons of the Trinity: man "is given his true purpose in the divine, triune life."[9] For this was the very point of Christ's entire salvific mission: "Now the purpose of the Son's 'going' was to bring the world back into th[e] unbreakable unity [between the Father and Son]; hence his return to the Father has no other meaning but to complete the world's incorporation into the triune life."[10] In the final section of *The Last Act* in the *Theo-Drama* Balthasar emphasizes that the goal of *theosis* is about participating "openly and manifestly in the trinitarian relations . . . [which] is at the core of eternal blessedness."[11]

In Balthasar's theology Christ's entire life and ministry, and the meaning of "redemption" itself, can only truly be comprehended within the context of his revelation of God as Trinity:

> The whole mystery of the Son's annihilation of death must not be understood merely as a mystery of "redemption" (from the annihilation of death that characterizes our existence in the world): it is redemptive only insofar as it manifests the ultimate

6. *TD* V, 67.

7. Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III.19.1; Athanasius of Alexandria, *De incarnatione* 54.3; Thomas Aquinas, *Opusculum* 57.1–4.

8. *TD* V, 384.

9. *TD* III, 528.

10. *TD* V, 518.

11. *TD* V, 428.

> horizon of meaning, which is God's all-embracing trinitarian love.[12]

Although Balthasar does not directly refer to deification here, it is implied, for since the "ultimate horizon of meaning" for humanity cannot be described as merely *knowing about* God's trinitarian love, but is about *being immersed* in that love, redemption must be understood within the broader and deeper context of deification.[13] In other words, Christ's Passion is only fully understood in reference to the goal of participation in the trinitarian life of God. As Balthasar asserts, man's freedom is "liberated 'for' something," not simply *from* something (namely sin and death), and that "something" is *theosis*.[14] Hence Christology must necessarily move towards trinitarian theology for its completion, and both must highlight *theosis* to convey the fullness of humanity's redemption.

Moreover, just as Christ reveals the Trinity, the Trinity reveals Christ, for the divine Persons are not only the wellspring of Christ's life, but provide its motive and determine its character: "It is the Trinity that decides upon the Incarnation of the Logos. . . . The initiative is attributed to the Father . . . the Incarnation of the Word is the historical center, and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, the eschatological consummation. By the same token the dimensions of the work itself can only be trinitarian."[15] Although "we have no access whatsoever to the *immanent* Trinity except as a result of the Trinity's *economic* self-manifestation,"[16] and thus trinitarian theology is inherently Christocentric, there is also a mutual relationship between God's inner nature and salvific actions, and consequently the reverse is equally true that "the mystery of [God's] inmost being enlightens our understanding of all his works."[17] Therefore, it is not only Christ's kenosis, but God's inner-trinitarian kenotic life that reveals the meaning of deification in Balthasar's theology, for God's salvific action (the divine *oikonomia*) and God's very Being (*theologia*) are mutually illuminating, both necessary in a reciprocal way in revealing the truth of existence.[18] As Balthasar asserts, it is disingenuous

12. *TD* V, 331.

13. He makes this integral link in the fourth volume of the *Theo-Drama*, as discussed earlier.

14. *TD* IV, 367.

15. *TL* II, 296.

16. *TL* III, 210.

17. *CCC* §236.

18. Regarding Balthasar's theology of the Trinity, Katy Leamy's comparison between the kenotic theologies of Balthasar and Bulgakov is insightful on this point. She asserts that "only with an accurate grasp of his kenotic Trinitarian theology can one adequately interpret difficult aspects of Balthasar's work such as the descent into hell, the idea

to claim that God's kenotic love revealed in salvation history is not connected to his very nature: "No one doubts that, as the New Testament tells us, the Father's act of giving up the Son and the Spirit in the economy is pure love, as is the Son's and the Spirit's act of freely letting themselves be given up. But how could this fundamental claim about the economy of salvation have no foundation in any property of the essence of the triune God?"[19]

Kenosis therefore provides a key connection between Balthasar's Christology and trinitarian theology, for to him it characterizes God's loving nature. This is evident when Balthasar emphasizes what he considers "one of the most important themes" of the final volume of his *Theo-Drama*: "What we see in Christ's forsakenness on the Cross, in ultimate creaturely negativity, is the revelation of the highest positivity of trinitarian love."[20] Along these lines, St. Irenaeus conveys an important yet too often neglected truth when he states that "if everything in the fate of Jesus is the revelation of his Father, so too is his Passion."[21] Christ's kenosis not only reveals the nature of God's love, but expresses the very mode of eternal being in Balthasar's theology:

> It is through Christ's mission that we come to know the Trinitarian God, who is "personal love" not only in his relating to human creatures but in *himself* as the one who is continually generating and imparting himself (Father), as the one who owes his being and gives it back (Son), and as the unity of the exchange of giving and taking, as quintessential Gift (Spirit) . . . these are not only three modalities of one mind but are true moments of *self*-surrender and *self*-transference between Father, Son and Spirit.[22]

Given this vital correlation between the economic and immanent Trinity in Balthasar's thought, it is not surprising that Edward Oakes, in comparing his work with other kenotic-oriented theologians, states that "Balthasar's Christology not only merits the name 'kenotic' but is perhaps the most radically kenotic Christology of all, for that kenosis has now become an event within the Trinity itself."[23]

---

that "God-forsakenness" is constitutive of the divine relation, the notion of "surprise" between the divine persons, and his understanding of the relation between divine and human freedom as "openness" to the other in relation" (Leamy, *Holy Trinity*,164).

19. *TL* II, 136.

20. *TD* V, 517.

21. *GL* II, 69. Balthasar is referring to Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* V.16.3.

22. *EXP* IV, 433.

23. Oakes, "He Descended into Hell," 239.

Throughout Balthasar's work Christ's kenosis is conveyed as an expression of inner-trinitarian life. For example, when discussing Christ's descent to the dead, he asserts that "these dimensions of God's engagement with the world are so deep a part of God's being that they are not merely an aspect of God's ad hoc soteriological strategy but already lie deep in the intradivine dimensions of unlimited surrender."[24] Providing a brief commentary on St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, on the passage that speaks of Christ, "who became poor for you although he was rich" (2 Cor 8:9), Balthasar again emphasizes the very nature and glory of God as kenotic:

> Christ, although rich, contrived to become utterly poor—not in appearance only, but in reality, not distributing his riches piece by piece like a rich man but disposing of them as a whole in the kenosis, so that he might then give what he had disposed of . . . as 'the proceeds to the poor.' This is something that only Christ could do, because in him his riches (to which he does not cling as to something robbed) and his act of giving away are one: the riches of selflessness in the triune divine nature, shown forth in the world in the kenosis of the Incarnation.[25]

While St. Paul contrasts Christ's poorness and richness, Balthasar reveals their dialectical integrity: becoming poor is not the antithesis of Christ's being rich, but its very manifestation since his whole being and glory are about self-giving love. And this way of being is not Christ's alone, but an expression of the "triune divine nature."[26]

The most important thing that can be gathered from the foregoing is both obvious and critical in evaluating Balthasar's theology: if God's very trinitarian mode of being is kenotic, and our destiny is to be recreated in God's likeness and participate in His life, then *theosis* is about being assimilated into this way of existence. "Becoming like God" goes beyond simply being "like Christ" to participating in the kenotic relations of the three

24. *EXP* IV, 36.

25. *GL* VII, 429.

26. Balthasar's description of God's very "nature" as kenotic in the foregoing discussion raises an important issue. On the one hand that characterization is rooted in the revelation of the Son and thereby eminently justifiable. On the other hand it arguably fails to honor the otherness of God who is beyond human comprehension, and thus inherently surpasses any descriptions of Him that we might have. As John of Damascus teaches: "All that we state affirmatively about God does not show His nature, but only what relates to His nature. And, if you should ever speak of good, or justice, or wisdom, or something else of the sort, you will not be describing the nature of God, but only things relating to His nature" (John of Damascus, *Writings*, 172). It thus may be more fitting if Balthasar spoke of kenosis as a primary "attribute" of God, rather than implying that it defines His very "nature."

Persons of the Trinity. We discover that the integral relationship between Christology and anthropology in Balthasar's theology must be understood within a trinitarian framework. In other words, we have moved from discussing humanity as the *imago Dei* to characterizing this image as the *imago Christi*; now it is essential to consider humanity as the *imago trinitatis*, for in Balthasar's theology this brings Christology to its completion and consequently most fully describes our ultimate end in *theosis*.

In the final volume of the *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar highlights this theme when he explores the trinitarian being of the world and seeks to create a trinitarian metaphysics of creation. After canvassing the work of various theologians on the topic, he speaks of the kenotic love of the Trinity as the archetype for humanity. Creaturely *becoming*, he asserts, is ultimately understood via the Trinity's mission and inner-trinitarian life: "the world's becoming has its origin in the sublime transactions between the Persons of the Trinity."[27] Thus he maintains that created being "owes its essential particularity in the first place to the Logos, its participation in non-finite being to the Father (to whom the creation is dedicated), and its vocation of self-surrender to the Spirit, who is the embodiment, in God, of love's generosity."[28] In one of the few passages where Balthasar explicitly speaks of humanity's "life within the Godhead" he insists that this life will bring to fulfillment who we are as the *imago Dei*—beings created with and destined to have a trinitarian character:

> Since God does not alienate himself from himself by becoming incarnate (since the obedient Son of Man is only the illustration of the eternal relatedness and selflessness of the divine Persons), Christ does not alienate man from himself when he raises him from the apparently closed substantiality of his personal being (in which he thinks that he definitively stands over against God) into the open relatedness of the life within the Godhead. Rather, Christ brings him into the genuine truth of his origin; he is a distant image of this (*imago trinitatis*) in the love between human persons.[29]

At the conclusion of his *Theo-Drama* where Balthasar presents key facets of his eschatology, he likewise asserts that just as "the Son's return to the Father with his transfigured body . . . causes his human nature to acquire trinitarian dimensions," so will those joined to him exist in a new trinitarian

27. *TD* V, 80.
28. *TD* V, 76.
29. *GL* VII, 409.

way.[30] Hence, Balthasar places the promise that "we shall be like [*homoios*] him" (1 John 3:2) within a relational context, for it "must refer, not to God's essence, but to his personal exchange of love."[31] This existence is not only communal, but also kenotic, typified by selfless "open relatedness" with one another and God.

Becoming "partakers of the divine nature" is therefore inherently a personal process, one of encounter, in Balthasar's theology. It is about first meeting and coming to know the person of Christ, and through him coming to share in God's own trinitarian life. The sole object of our prayer, contemplation and worship—the highest acts of humanity—is to know God's inner life through the revelation of Jesus Christ:

> All the rest, creation, man, the history of salvation, are contemplated in relation to God, and in order to find him; to find him in a spiritual and personal encounter of which we become conscious, through faith in the life God gives to the believer objectively as grace—a participation in the divine nature and the life of mutual love within the Trinity. That participation implies an encounter. God's inner life is not merely ontological and objective, but spiritual and personal. . . . Christ, the Incarnate Word of the Father, is both of these.[32]

Participating in the life of the Trinity means immersing oneself in the life of Christ, for through him we are given access to the "mutual love" between the three persons. This intimate portrayal of divine life is for Balthasar the only adequate way of conceiving the union between God and humanity.

30. *TD* V, 416. Norman Russell asserts that J. R. Illingworth seems to be the first to develop the theme of trinitarian personhood, and summarizes his thesis as follows: "Human personhood is triune and therefore fundamentally relational because that is the structure of the ultimate reality we call God—not a God locked in inaccessible unicity, but a social God, and hence a personal God. . . . To become partakers of the divine nature is therefore to share fully in the relationship of love between Father and the Son that was made accessible to us through the Incarnation. Only in this way do we realize the full potential of our personhood" (Russell, *Deification,* 313).

31. *TD* V, 427.

32. Balthasar, *Prayer*, 142. As Rodney Howsare highlights, "encounter" characterizes Balthasar's understanding of the foundation and goal of the relationship between God and creation: "Balthasar's slight modification of Aquinas's real distinction between God and the world, then, to which he is favourably disposed in general, consists of its placement in a relational context. This is where the central role of meta-anthropology comes into play. It is not that Balthasar now wishes to replace metaphysics with anthropology; it is rather that Balthasar offers metaphysical analysis at the point where Being has reached its inner-worldly high point: in the encounter between free persons" (Howsare, *Guide for the Perplexed,* 147–48).

Thus, it is no surprise that in comparison Balthasar considers the traditional scholastic conception of union with God as too cerebral and cataphatic:

> Describing God's entrusting of himself to us as *visio Dei* is always an inadequate and one-sided portrayal of this open encounter, since God can never be an object totally available to our sight. If we wish to keep the metaphor of "vision," we must speak in dialectical terms of the highest presence of something that is beyond all that we can grasp. Thus we shall come to see that, although God will offer himself to the creature . . . by the "lumen gloriae" as a "medium deducens," even in heaven he cannot be beheld "plene et secundum totum," not *comprehensive*.[33]

While Balthasar does not seek to replace the traditional notion of the beatific vision, it is clear that he insists on a far more relational and apophatic construction of its basic features.

Balthasar's strong relational emphasis on this theme could appear as an(other) avant-garde theological approach, yet in actuality it reflects an integral part of Church tradition, as evidenced, for example, in Thomas Aquinas's understanding of the Trinity as a *communio personarum*. As Adrian J. Walker notes, for Aquinas, the divine being "is a coincidence of substance and relation; and to say that each of the persons is God is to say, not just that he possesses the one divine substance, but that he is what God is, namely, a being constituted in the coincidence of selfbeing and relation, of substance and love."[34] Balthasar's emphasis on community as constitutive of divine and human personhood is also well attested to in Catholic personalist philosophies such as that of W. Norris Clarke, who emphasizes that "relationality is . . . an equally primordial dimension of being as substantiality."[35]

Accordingly, in Balthasar's theology, *theosis* is a mystery that can only ultimately be conveyed through an understanding of the very nature of God as Trinity. As he makes clear in his *Theo-Drama*, "The more trinitarian (which is to say, the richer) our picture of God is, the more we are able to have a positive attitude to the eternal perfecting of the world created and

33. *TD* V, 395–96.

34. Walker, "Personal Singularity," 458n2. He also notes that for Thomas the "content" of each Person "is, in each case, a different relation, or relational direction, rather than a different substance."

35. Clarke, *Person and Being*, 14–15. Clarke's philosophy also resonates with Balthasar's in emphasizing that "self-communication is written into the heart of all beings," and that receptivity is a fundamental aspect of being (Clarke, *Person and Being*, 12, 20). The writings of the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas should also be mentioned as an important representative of this theme. See especially Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*.

redeemed in God."[36] We are finally led to the core of *theologia* (θεολογία) itself as "the mystery of God's inmost life within the Blessed Trinity."[37] Once again—as in our discussion of Holy Saturday—we come to another hidden and awe-filled topic, where it is important to keep in mind that Balthasar speaks of mystery as an integral aspect of "the trinitarian character of truth itself."[38]

Perichoresis as "Making Room"

The theological term often used to characterize the divine life of the Trinity is *perichoresis* (περιχώρησις).[39] The *Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity* provides a helpful description of its meaning: "The term *Perichoresis* indicates the mode of existence of the persons of the Holy Trinity characterized by interpenetration, co-inhabitation, mutual fellowship, surrounding, or indwelling. In Greek, *perichoreo* means to 'make room,' to 'go or revolve around.'"[40] The root noun for the term is "chora" (χώρα), which literally means "space" or "room" and conveys a kenotic character, as noted by Olivier Clément:

> *Perichoresis*, the exchange of being by which each Person exists only in virtue of his relationship with the others, might be defined as a "joyful *kenosis*." The *kenosis* of the Son in history is the extension of the *kenosis* of the Trinity and allows us to share in it.[41]

These various facets of the concept of *perichoresis* reveal its value in Balthasar's theology of the Trinity, which focuses on the openness, or freedom, of inner-trinitarian life through the mutual kenosis of the three Persons.

In his *Epilogue*, Balthasar compares Christianity with Judaism, Islam and the Eastern religions and explains how the latter religions have always

36. *TD* V, 506.

37. *CCC* §236. This is reflected in the following dialogue of Isaac of Syria: "What is knowledge?" asks Abba Isaac, and he answers, "perception of the life which is immortal" (Vasileous, *Hymn of Entry*, 38).

38. *TD* V, 496.

39. However, the term was originally used in the context of Christology to convey "reciprocity of action" between Christ's two natures, and "the noun 'perichoresis' itself does not seem to occur at all until Maximus Confessor" (Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought,* 291, 293).

40. McGuckin, *Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 444.

41. Clément, *Christian Mysticism*, 67.

struggled regarding the relationship between God and humanity and are unable "to conceive how a finite being can possess definitive value and ultimate dignity next to an all-being God (or Absolute)."[42] The Christian faith, on the other hand, surpasses this hurdle through its very understanding of God as Trinity, maintaining that "it is [God's] sovereign will to *accord space* within his unity to the 'other.' Christianity asserts that this positive otherness of God justifies the being-other of the creature in relation to God. The 'other in God' can even be this 'other in creatureliness' without abandoning the difference of God/creature."[43] In a similar passage in his book *Prayer*, where he discusses the indwelling of God in the believer, Balthasar develops this thought more fully:

> Outside Christianity, whenever the idea of an infinite I indwelling in the finite I is seriously pursued, it inevitably leads to pantheism; the transition from a finite (empirical) I to the absolute, of necessity becomes a kind of blessed self-annihilation (cf. Fichte). In the Christian setting, on the contrary, an indwelling of the kind can be fully accepted without any dissolution of the finite personality; rather, it fulfills itself in a most mysterious way by being raised above itself to God. Here too there is a 'mystical' death of love, but it is, at the same time, a real, indeed bodily, resurrection in God. Such an indwelling by the Spirit of God presupposes the mystery of the Trinity in its fullest sense, the wonderful mutual indwelling (*circumincessio*) of the divine Persons without any infringement of their individual personality.[44]

Balthasar's understanding that God's nature as Trinity is one of intimate "mutual indwelling" implies that the very being of God consists in the valuing of the inherent difference of the other. God's very triune life involves "making room" for the other, thus opening up the possibility of others participating in divine life without being overwhelmed or immolated.

Balthasar's emphasis on God's triune desire to "accord space," to refrain from infringing on the personality of the other, as characterizing the trinitarian life of "mutual indwelling" is at the core of his theology of deification. This highly relational, personal, even psychological model is significantly different from classical conceptions centering on the beatific vision and the essence/energies distinction and opens up a valuable way of discussing and conceiving humanity's ultimate union with God. While on the one hand relational terms and categories of thought are admittedly imprecise and

42. Balthasar, *Epilogue*, 35.
43. Balthasar, *Epilogue*, 35. Italics mine.
44. Balthasar, *Prayer*, 61–62.

open to the critique of being too anthropomorphic, on the other hand they are arguably less abstract and more concrete than the former by focusing on the heart of the matter, which is the personal relationship between human persons and God (and indeed between the Persons of the Trinity).

For example, Balthasar's emphasis on the personal dimension of being enhances and deepens the meaning of basic theological conceptions such as "grace" and "ontology." In an illuminating discussion about the concept of "grace" in the *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar asserts that when one speaks of God's grace, one is speaking primarily of the gift of God's *presence*, his very being:

> We should recall that, in speaking of God, we are not restricted to personal categories, particularly if they are played off against ontic categories; the dimension of the personal is itself ontic. . . . That is, the presence of the Giver in the gift (and in its implied task), that is, the grace of God offered to us, can and must be expressed equally as an offer of *love* and an offer of *being* on God's part. And "being" must not, of course, be confused with some "thing." . . . For [in Christ] the very being of God coincides with his "being gift" and his "being love."[45]

Grace, love and being are all offered and returned together between persons—they are inseparable because "love" is the Giver himself.[46] In Balthasar's theological aesthetics it is love that is the "the hidden ground underlying the transcendentals and their circumincessive relation."[47] This relational way of explicating the integral union of love and being overcomes the tendency for *theologia* to become intellectualized, to focus too much on (supposedly) more objective mental constructs rather than speaking of the personal, communal reality of God. When being is understood as inseparable from personal relationship it makes such attempts impossible, as Balthasar underscores:

> If God becomes an object of my reason, he is no longer primarily the eye which sees me and in whose light I behold his light. Then it is I who proffer my own light to him, however much I

45. *TD* II, 314–15.

46. Pascal Ide describes how at the core of Balthasar's Christological conception of analogy is the mystery of the giftedness of love: "Balthasarian theology is a theology of love—precisely of a love given 'to the extreme' (John 13:1). . . . Indeed, if free, radical self-giving goes as far as disappropriation and total despoliation—kenosis or the self-annihilation [*Selbstvernichtigung*] of Christ . . . displays [*darstellt*] to the world the most radical form [*radikalsten Form*] of the personal love [*personale Liebe*] of the Trinitarian God—the kenotic event presupposes the ecstatic profusion of a free gift: one can empty only what is already filled" (Ide, "L'analogie selon Balthasar," 104).

47. *TL* I, 9.

> may endeavor to extend my finite mode of knowledge toward the absolute and to disappear as a person. No: God is the one who knows me. There is truth in Franz von Baader's formula: "*cogitur (cognoscor), ergo sum*": I am, because God knows me.[48]

Personal *knowing* is thus at the heart of what comprises human existence, for it is integral to being itself. As Balthasar implies, without being known by God, we would not exist.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger provides a helpful description about the nature of "true knowledge"—the personal *knowing* of the other. In an address on "The Beauty and the Truth of Christ" he highlights the theology of the fourteenth-century Byzantine theologian Nicholas Cabasilas, who

> distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge: knowledge through instruction which remains, so to speak, "second hand" and does not imply any direct contact with reality itself. The second type of knowledge, on the other hand, is knowledge through personal experience, through a direct relationship with the reality. "Therefore we do not love it to the extent that it is a worthy object of love, and since we have not perceived the very form itself we do not experience its proper effect." True knowledge is being struck by the arrow of Beauty that wounds man, moved by reality, "how it is Christ himself who is present and in an ineffable way disposes and forms the souls of men."[49]

Experiential knowledge of God through being in union with him via *theosis* is the highest form of knowledge—that of direct relationship. As superlative knowledge—that which is illumined by the eternal light of God's very Being—all other forms and expressions of what we deem "knowledge" are mere shadows, lacking substance because of their ambiguity and error. First-hand *knowing* is at the heart of what deification means as Balthasar attests:

> When there is an intimate personal relationship between Jesus and the believer ("I know my own and my own know me" [John 10:14]), this reciprocal knowledge means that each party has a way into the interior of the other, facilitating an inner vision which as such is not just any life but "eternal life": "This is eternal life, that they know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).[50]

48. Balthasar, *Does Jesus Know Us?*, 54.

49. Ratzinger, "Beauty and the Truth of Christ," 6. Ratzinger quotes from Cabasilas, *Life in Christ,* 2:15.

50. Balthasar, *Does Jesus Know Us?*, 94–95.

If this epitomizes the gospel promise, then it is not too bold to say that all theologies of deification must incorporate this essential element of relational, personal knowledge if they are not to be misleading about the meaning of union with God, and in fact the very nature of divine Truth.

Balthasar's relational conception of trinitarian life as comprising both "indwelling" and "according space" subsequently reveals a way to overcome the classic unity/difference conundrum in the theology of deification. He emphasizes the mutual recognition of the mystery of the other as constitutive of life in God; in particular, that the closer one comes to God, the more one becomes aware of, and wonders in, the infinite depths of not only God's Being, but that of all human beings. Intimacy paradoxically reveals otherness; union goes hand-in-hand with growth in particularity. It is the inherent mystery of the person, both as an individual and in communion with others, that is a key aspect of Balthasar's explanation regarding how there can be true union with God without an overwhelming of the other in a kind of fusion. As he asserts in his *Theo-Logic*, it is the nature of the Trinity itself, in its communal embracing of otherness, that overcomes the barrier to union, the seemingly impassable rift between the natural and supernatural orders:

> The revelation of the Trinity throws an unexpected bridge across this (abiding) abyss. If, within God's identity, there is an Other, who at the same time is the image of the other and thus the archetype of all that can be created; if, within this identity, there is a Spirit, who is the free, superabundant love of the "One"'and of the "Other," then both the otherness of creation, which is modeled on the archetypal otherness within God, and its sheer existence, which it owes to the intradivine liberality, are brought into a positive relationship to God.[51]

Creation is therefore "very good" (Gen 1) not *despite* its otherness from God, but *because* of it. Otherness is at the heart of the meaning of this goodness, because it is part of God's very nature as trinitarian Being. Furthermore, the revelation of God as a community of three Persons does not only create the possibility of creation's union with God, but the very trinitarian *character* of this unity also guarantees that the "otherness of creation" retains its "otherness" and is not engulfed and hence immolated in the presence of the divine. As Balthasar explains, the necessary "distance" occurs in and through Christ:

51. *TL* II, 180–81.

> If God's idea of the world is to bring heaven and earth together in Jesus Christ in the fullness of time, so that "we may be holy and blameless before him" (*katenōpion autou*, Eph 1:4), it follows that this incorporation of all created beings into the Begotten is, in trinitarian terms, the most intimate manner of union with God. For it implies that the creaturely "other-than-God" is plunged into the uncreated "Other-in–God" *while maintaining* that fundamental "distance" which alone makes love possible.[52]

It is Christ, the concrete *analogia entis*, who in his very person expresses and unites the similarity in the "greater dissimilarity" in the relation between God and humanity. He incorporates the creature, who is inherently "other-than-God" given that his essence and existence are not inseparable as they are in God, into the inherent "otherness" of trinitarian being. It is the basic character of creatureliness as "other" that not only most fully denotes the dissimilarity between God and creation, but also expresses its similarity to the trinitarian God, since God's very nature is "otherness" in unity. For the ultimate union of love requires "distance"—a property that defines both creaturely and divine Being.[53]

However, although incorporation into Christ initiates this union, it is ultimately the Trinity itself that creates and maintains it. That is because Christ himself is an "Other-in-God," One of Three inviting creation to join the very "otherness within God" that characterizes trinitarian life. For the distance that "alone makes love possible" is an eternal attribute of the divine, thus is assured solely through the very triune nature of God Himself. Consequently, Balthasar can rightly assert that "only a trinitarian God can guarantee that man will not forfeit his independent being when united with God."[54]

52. *TD* V, 105.

53. This is more fully discussed in Johnson, *Christ and Analogy*, where he explains that "that which grounds the *dissimilitudo* is identical to that which grounds the *similitudo.* And that thing is the most fundamental ontological characteristic of creaturely make-up, the very sign of creatureliness, namely the fact that one's being and one's essence are not the same. Because of this, creatures differ maximally from a Creator whose essence is to be, is his very act of being; but also because of this, creatures greatly resemble a God who is three persons in one essence" (Johnson, *Christ and Analogy*, 143).

54. *TD* V, 108.

Triune Kenosis

God's gift of "making room" within Himself to unify creation with Himself is another revelation of His kenotic love, which is woven into the very fabric of creation. For Balthasar, God's self-giving trinitarian nature is the source and rationale of all creaturely freedom:

> If God's nature, theologically speaking, shows itself to be "absolute love" (*autocharis*) by giving away and allowing others to be, for no other reason than that this (motiveless) giving is good and full of meaning—and hence is, quite simply, beautiful and glorious—the same must apply to his "making room" for his free creatures. They only gain room for freedom, however, if God, in allowing them freedom, withdraws to a certain extent and becomes latent.[55]

Balthasar's thought on this matter conveys a sense that God must "empty Himself" by withholding his power if the true freedom which is necessary for love is to come forth. This theme is not unique to Balthasar's theology, but well attested in the Judeo-Christian tradition.[56] For example, Vladimir Lossky, in his book *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, highlights the patristic teaching on the subject: "We might say that by creation *ex nihilo* God 'makes room' for something which is wholly outside of Himself; that, indeed, He sets up the 'outside' or nothingness alongside of His plenitude. The result is a subject which is entirely 'other,' infinitely removed from Him, 'not by place but by nature' . . . as it is expressed by St. John Damascene."[57]

As a result, any conception of humanity's "likeness" to God is impossible without having some degree of autonomy implied by its being created in the *imago Dei*. As Balthasar asserts, God's gift of "positive Being" to humanity assures the "otherness" necessary for loving relationship (and the avoidance of any sense of fusion), thus making union possible: "Even

55. *TD* II, 272–73.

56. For example, Emmanuel Levinas, the French Jewish philosopher, highlights that in a strand of the Talmudic tradition the greatest expression of God's almighty power is his withdrawal, or *self-contraction*. (In Hebrew, *tsimtsum*, צמצום.) A rationale behind this belief is that created being requires space in order to exist with a sense of individuality and freedom. Cf. Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*. Furthermore, the recent Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius IV, explains that "The notion of 'nothing' [in the scriptural creation account] here is a kind of 'limit' and suggests that God, who has no 'beyond,' makes the universe appear by a kind of 'self-withdrawal': the location of the world is thus within the love of God, a love which is supremely inventive while at the same time it is sacrificial" (Ignatius IV, "Theology of Creation," 2). Also see the essays of Jürgen Moltmann and John Polkinghorne in Polkinghorne, *Work of Love*.

57. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 92–93.

greater than a God who defines himself only by his absolute otherness from the world is the God who proves his otherness by giving the other positive Being, an assured existence and therefore—beyond the abyss remaining between them—granting him a genuine likeness to himself."[58] Consequently, Balthasar suggests that the earth's very distinctiveness is constitutive of its potential for *theosis*: "The fact that God has given the earthly realm its own autonomy, so that it can freely turn and move toward him, shows that there is room for it in God."[59] Balthasar's thought on this theme is rooted in that of St. Maximus, who speaks about an identity between God and creature, yet one that is inherently an "'identity in difference' . . . [for it] is the result of our being made like God by grace."[60] Since only God is "truly an identity," the identity of the world "always depends on the identity of its not-being-God, and thus on its yearning movement toward the identity of God in himself."[61] It is thus humanity's identity *in difference*, in creatureliness, that not only defines it, but is the drawing force towards *theosis*.

This gifted autonomy is entirely the fruit of God's kenosis, which is natural for God since it characterizes the very movement of his love. Balthasar conveys this movement in the life of the Trinity in a perichoretic way:

> It is precisely in this infinite surrender and self-renunciation, in this absolute preference of the Thou to the I, that the life of the Trinity consists; for it is a life in which the Persons can be conceived only "relatively," that is, through one another. The Father only is, as he who generates the Son, he who surrenders and pours himself out in the Son; and the Son is, only as he who utterly surrenders himself to the Father, acknowledging himself to be the Father's glory and image; the Spirit is, only as witnessing and expressing the love between the Father and the Son, and proceeding from them.[62]

For Balthasar, it is this loving self-surrender, expressing God's selfless, even carefree, way of being that is the ultimate guarantee of humanity's autonomy in *theosis*.[63] This kenotic expression of love assures a union between God

58. *KL*, 76.

59. *TD* V, 375.

60. *CL*, 235.

61. *CL*, 235.

62. *WR*, 33–34.

63. Schindler explains God's kenotic gift of self which makes this possible: "This 'not holding on to itself,' then, is what Balthasar calls the poverty of divine being. . . . If God were merely rich, then the creature would be mere poverty, that is, sheer negativity, in relation to God. . . . But God is so rich, as it were, that he can afford to be poor: in other words, in his wealth he does not need to hold onto himself but can allow a

and humanity that not only recognizes, but celebrates and even nurtures difference. As a consequence, God's gift of identity, uniqueness, and freedom to humanity is never lost, but is indeed fulfilled and perfected in union with God.

Although we come to know the trinitarian God, to share in his divine life, through the economic manifestation of Christ and incorporation into his life, Balthasar insists that "we would never attain to a knowledge of the life of the Trinity in Christ . . . unless we had also been made participators, from the outset, in the subjective relationship of the Son made man to his heavenly Father in the Holy Spirit."[64] When we meet Christ, we relate to all three Persons of the Trinity as Balthasar portrays in his "formula" of trinitarian theology: "The Father shows himself in the Son, who, for his part, points to the Father; and the Spirit (who is of both) directs attention to this reciprocal 'showing' that reveals God as love."[65]

The role of the Father, particularly what Balthasar calls his "primal kenosis," comes to the forefront of his trinitarian theology in his *Theo-Drama*. In fact, a chief rationale of Balthasar's description of the inner life of the Trinity in such a kenotic way comes from his conviction that Christ's kenosis should not be understood as his unique obedience in the performance of the redemptive task; rather, his life and passion are the manifestation of the Father's first kenosis—what Balthasar calls *Urkenosis*.[66] The kenosis of Christ is not simply a temporary "means to an end," a "once for all" action in human history, but reveals God's nature, since its source is in the Father: "It is possible to say, with Bulgakov, that the Father's self-utterance in the generation of the Son is an initial 'kenosis' within the Godhead that underpins all subsequent kenosis. For the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son; he 'imparts' to the Son all that is his."[67] It is important to note that this teaching concerning the Father's kenosis is no mere aside in Balthasar's thought, or one tangential speculation among others on the nature of God. Balthasar speaks of this as the "primal drama" of the cosmos: "it is the drama of the 'emptying' of the Father's heart, in the generation of the Son, that contains and surpasses all possible drama between God and a world."[68] There is thus, according to Balthasar,

corresponding wealth on the part of creatures in relation to him" (Schindler, *Dramatic Structure of Truth*, 48).

64. Balthasar, *Prayer*, 143.

65. *TL* III, 185.

66. *TD* IV, 326.

67. *TD* IV, 323.

68. *TD* IV, 327. See recent work on this theme by Nathanaël Pujos, who affirms that Balthasar defines "God's love" in and through the inner-trinitarian relationship of

an eternal, divine kenosis that characterizes the Father's being and hence precedes the Son's Incarnation. In essence, kenosis is a divine attribute that permeates and defines salvation history:

> This primal kenosis makes possible all other kenotic movements of God into the world; they are simply its consequences. The first "self-limitation" of the triune God arises through endowing his creatures with freedom. The second, deeper, "limitation" of the same triune God occurs as a result of the covenant, which, on God's side, is indissoluble, whatever may become of Israel. The third kenosis, which is not only christological but involves the whole Trinity, arises through the Incarnation of the Son alone: henceforth he manifests his eucharistic attitude (which was always his) in the *pro nobis* of the Cross and Resurrection for the sake of the world.[69]

Even more importantly, in Balthasar's theology the Father's *Urkenosis* is the prerequisite for creation's deification. He asserts that even prior to creation's existence its union with God was envisioned and made possible through the Father's positing and embracing of "distance" via the generation of his Son:

> The Father must not be thought to exist "prior" to this self-surrender (in an Arian sense): he *is* this movement of self-giving that holds nothing back. This divine act that brings forth the Son, that is, the second way of participating in (and of *being*) the identical Godhead, involves the positing of an absolute, infinite "distance" that can contain and embrace all the other distances that are possible within the world of finitude, including the distance of sin.[70]

The Father's primal act of kenotic love simultaneously creates the most radical difference and (paradoxically) the potential for embracing all possible difference. This occurs through the generation of community in unity: it is the *relationship* between the Father and the Son that makes the embracing of "all the other distances" possible. Thus, the first and primary foundation of deification originates in the Father's primal kenosis and is rooted in the very nature of communal being.

---

kenosis which is grounded first and foremost in the Father's love (Pujos, *La «Kénose» du Père*).

69. *TD* IV, 331.

70. *TD* IV, 323.

Another key facet of the foregoing passage is Balthasar's conveyance of the Father as kenotic movement—i.e., that his existence cannot be separated from this movement. It is not too far a stretch to assert that Balthasar here implies that this "self-giving that holds nothing back" defines God's very Being, the *actus purus*. For he goes on to state that "inherent in the Father's love is an absolute renunciation: he will not be God for himself alone. He lets go of his divinity and, in this sense, manifests a (divine) God-lessness (of love, of course)."[71] This line of reasoning is expanded and clarified when Balthasar describes kenosis as definitive of the Father's being: "[In] this self-surrender, he *is* the whole divine essence. Here we see both God's infinite power and his powerlessness; he cannot be God in any other way but in this 'kenosis' within the Godhead itself. (Yet what omnipotence is revealed here! He brings forth a God who is of equal substance and therefore uncreated, even if, in this self-surrender, he must go to the very extreme of selflessness.)"[72]

It is this kenosis of being that encapsulates "the whole divine essence" that is revealed in Christ Jesus: "the Father is seen by no one . . . except in the emptiness of the Son that is ready for him and in his own self-attestation in this emptied-out space."[73] Therefore, the Son, in his words and actions, expresses the kenotic love of the Father, and with it his desire that all creation be united as one in him:

> The Son, by humiliating himself, intended to express, not a kind of neutral "essence" of God, but, as he repeatedly said, the particular "essence," the inmost *nature* and *disposition* of the Father who sent him. From the Father there came into the visible world his divine image, his "Word," who, like him, is a Person, his Son. In all that the Son is and does the Father expresses himself. The Son's love in its totality is a representation of the Father's; his acceptance of death on the cross, his sense of utter abandonment by God, all this was to make visible how the Father "so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son." So that the Father really and not just fictitiously, passes over his Son's dead body to reach a stranger, an enemy, namely man, and draw him to himself.[74]

71. *TD* IV, 324. In the fifth volume of the *Theo-Drama*, quoting von Speyr (which he does profusely in this volume), Balthasar goes so far as to advance the "fact" that the Father even "renounce[es] his uniqueness" in generating the Son. This "pre-sacrifice" of the Father in turn makes possible the "actual" renunciation, or sacrifice of the Son on the Cross (*TD* V, 510).

72. *TD* IV, 325.

73. *GL* VII, 379–80.

74. Balthasar, *Prayer*, 148. Italics mine.

In this passage Balthasar focuses on a divine truth rarely emphasized: that the Son's kenosis reveals not simply his own disposition, but the Father who sent him; that the desire of personal union with humanity is first and foremost that of the Father's.

Likewise, the Spirit, who is "the fruit of the trinitarian relations," both expresses God's kenotic being and leads humanity to *theosis*.[75] Balthasar characterizes the work of the Spirit as inherently kenotic, reflecting the life of the Father and the Son:

> We spoke of a first "kenosis" of the Father, expropriating himself by "generating" the consubstantial Son. Almost automatically, this first kenosis expands to a kenosis involving the whole Trinity. For the Son could not be consubstantial with the Father except by self-expropriation; and their "We," that is, the Spirit, must also be God if he is to be the "personal" seal of that self-expropriation that is identical in Father and Son. For the Spirit does not want anything "for himself" but, as his revelation in the world shows, wants simply to be the pure manifestation and communication of the love between Father and Son (John 14:26; 16:13–15).[76]

Throughout his work, Balthasar often refers to the Holy Spirit as *donum doni*, the giving of a gift: "He arises from the reciprocal love of Father and Son and so is *relatio* . . . [but] the Spirit is more than the mere relatedness of Father and Son (although, in terms of essence, he is this, too): beyond the reciprocal giving, the Spirit is the gift, the *donum*."[77] The Spirit is the gift itself because he gives God himself: "if the Spirit is given to the creature as a gift, it is a gift that contains the whole being of the Godhead; it implies the 'divinizing' of the creature."[78] In his book *Prayer*, Balthasar further explains the role of the Spirit in deification by emphasizing that through him we are brought "into the mystery of divine sonship, and we may even follow those theologians who say that we share by grace in the Son's generation from the Father."[79]

In summary, each of the three Persons of the Trinity has a unique role in Balthasar's theology of deification, and all are characterized by kenosis. He therefore speaks of the groundless love of God's kenosis as the "transcendental par excellence," and that the very "identity of the divine essence

75. *TL* III, 201.
76. *TD* IV, 331.
77. *TL* III, 161.
78. *TL* III, 161.
79. Balthasar, *Prayer*, 57.

is found in the positive self-expropriation of the Divine Persons, which in all three is one, true, and good.[80] He goes so far as to dramatically describe the nature of the "total reciprocal self-giving" between the Father and the Son, and expressed in the Spirit as "God's 'blood-circulation,' the mutual exchange of blood between the Persons, that . . . is the basis for there being a 'death' in God."[81] Aidan Nichols, in his commentary on this passage, offers a more literal and vivid translation of the original German, namely that "mutual '*bloodletting*' (Verbluten) is God's 'circulation' (Blutkreislauf)."[82] Thus, in Balthasar's conception, the giving of one's life in (literal) self-emptying and sacrifice characterizes the *perichoresis* of trinitarian life. Needless to say, this characterization of trinitarian life is made clear time and again in Balthasar's theology, so it will suffice to offer only one more summarizing quote: "What is called "God's *kenosis*" is certainly acute in the unique life and suffering of Jesus, but it is also in this context the revelation of God's own way of eternal being: it is according to God the Father's very mode of being to "abandon" his Son, "to pour out" his Pneuma, in order that he might be his own "divine form" (Phil 2:6) in this act of self-surrender."[83]

The Infusion of the Divine Identity

If kenosis characterizes "the very being" of the Trinity, as Balthasar attests, then it is necessarily integral to humanity's *theosis* since we are not only created but destined to exist in the *imago Dei*—the *imago trinitatis*. As Balthasar emphasizes, we reach completion and fulfillment when we come to reflect God's image: "just as the Divine Persons are *themselves* only insofar as they

80. *TL* II, 178. As already noted, the kenotic theology of Sergius Bulgakov rivals Balthasar's in conveying that God's self-emptying in Christ reflects the inner life of the Trinity. His most important work on this theme is presented in a trilogy consisting of *The Lamb of God* (1933), *The Comforter* (1936), and *The Bride of the Lamb* (1939). See Gavrilyuk, "Kenotic Theology."

81. *TD* V, 245.

82. Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 211. Italics mine. The German "verbluten" literally connotes "bleeding to death."

83. *EXP* IV, 59. It is worthwhile to note that while speaking of God's very being as kenotic is distinctively (and mystically) envisioned and emphasized in Balthasar's theology, it is not unique in the Church's tradition. For example, St. Cyril of Alexandria asserts that "'the entire mystery of economy' . . . consists in the self-emptying and abasement of the Son of God' . . . this renunciation of His own will is not a choice, or an act, but is so to speak the very being of the Persons of the Trinity who have only one will proper to their common nature. . . . The κένωσις is the mode of existence of the Divine Person who was sent into the world, the Person in whom was accomplished the common will of the Trinity whose source is the Father" (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 144–45).

go out to the Others (who are always Other), the created essences too are *themselves* only insofar as they go beyond themselves and indicate their primal ground (whence being in its totality shines forth) and their vocation of self-surrender."[84] Hence, deification is a process that involves a growth in kenotic love, for its presence supremely manifests deity.

In the final volume of *Theo-Drama*, where Balthasar devotes a small section to discussing the transformation of the "mortal world . . . into a world that will not pass away," he characterizes the deifying process as occurring "in an essentially trinitarian manner" through the kenotic, cosmological "Christ-event": "the transformation proceeds from the dying Son (whose death contains the germ of the new world), from the Father (who awakens him to life) and from the Spirit, who is the 'glory' that 'comes from the Lord who is the Spirit' (2 Cor 3:18) and characterizes the newly formed world."[85] It is here in Balthasar's theology that he conveys that it is the very communal, kenotic nature of the Trinity itself that provides the basis for the union between heaven and earth. After asserting that there is a certain "quality of 'renunciation' in the eternal trinitarian life,"[86] he maintains that "it is precisely this quality of eternal life that enables temporal becoming to be a kind of copy of it."[87] Balthasar describes this kenotic "quality of eternal life" as a self-emptying that paradoxically reveals the very fullness of God: "[Christ's] 'having' a human nature . . . is therefore nothing other than the earthly representation of the trinitarian poverty, in which everything is always already given away. This poverty is God's infinite wealth, which is perfectly manifested in Christ's eucharistic love."[88] One could not be more explicit in emphasizing the kenotic character of God: for Balthasar God's very way of being is such that "everything" is "always" and "already" given away. His insistence that kenosis is at the heart of all the divine attributes challenges the way we conceive of far more common, traditional descriptions of God as, for example, "omnipotent," "immutable," and "impassable."

Supra-rational antinomy in all of its mystery therefore governs the way deification must be conceived. "Becoming God" requires a radical shift of perception since God's being and actions often confound and always surpass our conceptions. Poverty is God's wealth, and creaturely negativity is transformed into trinitarian positivity. All of this is consonant with Balthasar's belief (rooted in his understanding of the relationship between

84. *TD* V, 76.
85. *TD* V, 379.
86. *TD* V, 510.
87. *TD* V, 512.
88. *TD* V, 516.

nature and grace) that the world is not "moving from a position 'outside God' to a position 'inside' God: instead there must be a change in the condition of the world while it remains equally close to, and immanent in, God."[89] This "change in condition" occurs through immersion in the life of Christ, which opens up a completely different, divine perspective of reality so that it is possible to recognize the "positivity" of poverty, renunciation, kenosis, and hence become more like God.

It is the quality of "renunciation," or kenosis, in the life of the Trinity that offers a fuller explanation about how, in being deified, humanity is not completely overwhelmed by divinity and hence *de facto* "fused" into God. Balthasar speaks about humanity being *infused* by God's kenotic Being:

> The infusion of the divine identity does not involve any strain or distortion of the creature's potential, for *it takes place through God's own condescension and abasement* to the forms of creaturely non-identity. Nor does participation in the divine uniqueness do violence to what is nameless, specific in the creature, since God himself, in Christ, is "Son of man," one man, that is, among all the rest.[90]

This very infusion of God's identity does not subvert or immolate the creature's identity because it occurs through God's own "abasement," namely Christ's creatureliness. God protects the creature's autonomy through his kenosis, squandering his own absolute, eternal Personhood for the sake of the freedom and fulfillment of the other. One can subsequently go further than Balthasar here in asserting that this infusion not only does not do violence to human identity, but indeed fulfills and maximizes the creature's potential.

In describing God's "condescension and abasement" as integral to creation's deification Balthasar's theology reaches an extremity in stretching the bounds of tradition when he refers to the "unity and difference" in the Godhead during the Paschal mystery. For in his theology of the *triduum mortis* Jesus experiences true, unfathomable distance between the Persons of the Trinity through becoming accursed by the world's sin and forsaken by the Father. Yet the intimate unity between the Persons of the Trinity somehow, simultaneously envelops the vast distance between them:

> The distance between the Lord, abandoned on the Cross, and his Father reveals not only sin's distance from God but also the infinite, incomprehensible, abysmal vastness within God

89. *TD* V, 395.

90. *WR*, 47–48. Italics mine.

> himself, the expanse existing among the divine Persons. At the same time, however, an utterance such as 'I and the Father are one' opens up a wide vista into their no less inconceivable nearness: into their identity of nature.[91]

It is Christ's kenosis in the Paschal mystery that superlatively reveals the "abysmal vastness" of the distance between the Persons of the Trinity. Through conceiving the very nature of the Trinity in this dialectical, relational way—as encompassing the greatest distance in an equally "inconceivable nearness"—Balthasar reveals the foundation for humanity's incorporation into the life of the Trinity: that there is "room" in God for the "other," no matter how "distant" the other may be. It is through this most radical antinomy that Balthasar explains how even created being is somehow able to participate in the divine. In the concluding pages of his *Theo-Drama*, where Balthasar discusses the inherently mysterious nature of God's self-revelation in Christ, he speaks of this inner-trinitarian phenomenon in the context of God's relationship with humanity—namely that distance creates nearness and vice versa:

> The closer the mystery [of God] draws and the more it reveals itself, the more mysterious it becomes: we are overwhelmed by God's nearness, and 'what creates the distance between us and God is in fact his incomprehensible and overpowering nearness.' Finally, at this point, the mystery of the creature's origin and goal, hitherto vague and lacking in nuance, suddenly crystallizes and becomes evident as the mystery of the Trinity.[92]

As we have seen time and again, Balthasar's theology of deification is characterized by a highly personal and psychological approach, and is finally rooted in the "mystery of the Trinity" which constitutes the very meaning and shape of human existence. He places great weight on the

91. Balthasar, *Grain of Wheat*, 72.

92. *TD* V, 495. Balthasar's relational approach to deification, emphasizing the integral correspondence between distance and nearness, intriguingly shares key elements with phenomenological accounts of knowledge. They both seek to complement metaphysics by drawing from experience, placing emphasis on the relationship between things, and the nature of understanding as *gift*. For example, Robert Sokolowski speaks of persons as "datives of disclosure"—the ones to whom things are revealed. Phenomenology begins with the consciousness of the *subject*, who seeks to move beyond mere appearances of objects or essences (which appear relative) to their identity (i.e., their reality or truth). Thus, hiddenness, or "absences" provide meaning and consequently play a key role in the discovery of truth. They are part of appreciating the presence of a thing: "Presences take on a deeper meaning . . . when they are played off against the absent" (Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology,* 37).

value of relational experience—in man's personal encounter with the Living God—in his attempts to illuminate the theme. His description of relational nearness engendering a freeing distance between persons, and the distance created by the mystery of the person (or Persons) producing an even deeper nearness, is one of many examples of how Balthasar addresses the issue of unity and difference within a personalist model. This unique emphasis is helpful in accentuating the inherently personal nature of *theosis* which is often lacking in traditional accounts and is therefore a worthwhile addition to theology in this area. Nevertheless, only time will tell to what extent his more subjective and indeed intimate way of conceiving the reality of deification will find a place within the broader theological tradition of the Church.

11

Synergy as the Way of Deification

The full law of "deification" reads: As Christ is essentially the descending God, so too the ascent of our "participation in God" occurs solely through participation in God's descent. The glory of God (the core of deification) is found within the scandal of the cross (the core of redemption).[1]

—ERICH PRZYWARA

The majority of theological discussions about deification in western theology focus on its metaphysical aspect: how an eschatological, "real" union between creation and the Creator, the non-divine and divine, is even possible. However, limiting the theme to that particular topic while neglecting its anthropological implications reveals a fundamental misunderstanding about the very nature of *theosis* which can easily denigrate the fullness of its meaning. For the question of humanity's future state of life in God is inseparable from the existential question of humanity's response to God in the present. The "way" of deification in the life of the Christian is thus arguably a far more important subject for theologians to address than more philosophical-related inquiries regarding the *analogia entis*.

Balthasar rightly notes that "Scripture promises us even in this life a participation—albeit hidden under the veil of faith—in the internal life of God."[2] In other words, deification begins now: "eternal life is not a continu-

1. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 368.
2. *TD* V, 425.

ation of transitory life; it does not begin 'after death' but is perpendicular to it."[3] Norman Russell in *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* notes the early patristic understanding in this regard: "Even as early as the second century, Justin and Irenaeus held that 'participation in immortality and incorruption is not postponed to the eschaton but attained in principle as a result of the believer's incorporation into Christ through baptism.'"[4] Therefore, *theosis* is both an end and a process—a "becoming," a growing in relationship that itself defines the nature of what it means to be "deified." This participation between God and humanity is traditionally called "synergy" (συνεργός), which literally means "to work together," or "put forth power together." Although Balthasar seldom refers to synergy explicitly, in the last volume of his *Theo-Drama* entitled "The Final Act" he uses the ubiquitous term of Byzantine theology to describe the process of deification: it is through this "inseparable yet unconfused interaction" with the Church that the Holy Spirit "will draw into himself the heavenly perfection of the sacrifice of Jesus."[5] Furthermore, commenting on the transport of the soul away from the self and towards God, Balthasar emphasizes the need for humanity's cooperation in the process:

> The whole truth of this mystery is that the movement which God (who is the object that is seen in Christ and who enraptures man) effects in man (even in his unwillingness and recalcitrance, due to sin) is co-effected willingly by man through his Christian *eros* and, indeed, on account of the fact that the divine Spirit en-thuses and in-spires man to collaboration.[6]

One could in fact reasonably make the argument that Balthasar's entire *Theo-Drama* is focused on the theme of synergy, rooted as it is in the active, collaborative quintessence of the "good."[7] Throughout his theodramatics, he emphasizes that while it is God's descent, his penetration of humanity in Christ, that makes *theosis* possible, and the Spirit's power that brings it to fruition (not humanity's attempts to penetrate the Godhead through spiritual effort), it is nevertheless God's desire that we, as created in the *imago*

3. *TD* V, 499.

4. Russell, *Deification*, 113.

5. *TD* V, 416n8.

6. *GL* I, 121.

7. In the introduction to his theodramatics, Balthasar states: "we must allow the encountering reality to speak in its own tongue or, rather, let ourselves be drawn into its dramatic arena. For God's revelation is not an object to be looked at: it is his action in and upon the world, and the world can only respond, and hence 'understand,' through action on *its* part" (*TD* I, 15).

Dei, participate freely in the process and so contribute to our salvation (cf. Phil 2:12).

Consequently, synergy is by no means a peripheral or tangential issue within the theology of deification; nor is it merely a matter of "practical" or "pastoral" theology. For mere intellectual understanding of the divine-human relationship does not lead to deification, nor is an efficacious understanding even possible outside of the living experience of faith realized in obedience within the Church. In exploring the meaning of deification it is therefore fruitful to investigate the various aspects of synergy, rather than to continually rework the classical topics of the *visio Dei* and the essence/energies antinomy. For the latter approaches are inherently limited descriptions of the reality of the union between God and humanity (as all concepts are), and often fail to translate into something meaningful for human existence—namely, the *orthopraxis* which deifies. Furthermore, if God's very nature is personal and relational as trinitarian being, and his relationship with the world is characterized by kenotic love, then *theosis* has everything to do with humanity's very practical ongoing response to God's revelation in Christ through his body, the Church. Humanity's participation in *theosis*—synergy—must harmonize with that vision of God and reality. As Andrew Louth rightly emphasizes, "[The] notion of an exchange, of what the Latin Fathers called *admirabile commercium* (wonderful exchange), is the place where deification fits; it is not so much a doctrine to be analyzed, as a way of capturing the nature and extent of our response to the Incarnation."[8] In this sense, deification is in significant ways more about *praxis* in the here and now than speculating about the metaphysical mystery of ultimate union with God to come. For synergy creates, nurtures and defines the nature of that union.

How does Balthasar characterize the meaning of "synergy"? Most importantly it is a cooperation characterized by grace, since it is rooted in the very person of Christ, whose two natures—divine and human—create the condition necessary for the participation between God and creation: "Grace, which of its very nature is bestowed absolutely, includes in itself the absolute challenge to lead a life according to grace."[9] Furthermore, it incorporates the entire Church as Christ's mystical Body. As Balthasar explains, "'Synergy' expresses an inseparable yet unconfused interaction. Thus it is primarily christological in the sense of Chalcedon; but this first synergy

8. Louth, "Place of *Theosis*," 34.

9. Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 338.

yields a second, which is both its effect and its response, namely, that between the Spirit and the Church."[10]

A helpful entry point to his thought on the subject is via a discussion in his theological aesthetics concerning man's partnership with God, where he explores the notion of "fruitfulness," a "dominant idea that runs through the whole of the New Testament" that is explicitly connected with "glorification" (particularly through the image of the vine and branches).[11] Here Balthasar emphasizes humanity's responsibility for "bearing fruit" in response to God's gifts of grace: "The theme of reward and punishment is found in all the parables of sowing and growth, of vine-dressers and of talents, and they all point with urgency to the date for delivery, the day of judgment."[12] Yet this task cannot be completed alone, nor is the responsibility for bearing fruit borne alone, for synergy is always rooted in the grace that is conferred through being joined to Christ:

> The human person who is required to achieve and to decide will be able to bear his fruit only "in Christ," out of him and through him . . . but in such a way that it is precisely through this unity that the human person is empowered to a new fruitfulness of his own, which was previously unknown to him.[13]

For Balthasar, synergy is far less about a "joint venture" than a process of being drawn into new life—it is our incorporation into Christ's life that alone brings fruition to human endeavors. This process of unification involves pruning, a purification process which Balthasar describes as a "deeper expropriation in the spirit of Jesus' fruitfulness because the ultimate fruitfulness belongs to Jesus' perfect poverty which went to the point of relinquishing himself."[14] It is kenosis that first and foremost bears fruit in humanity's synergy with God.

The Role of the Human Will

In many ways the most controversial aspect of the theology of deification has less to do with the possibility of union between the divine and non-divine than the possibility of cooperation between the two in the process.

10. *TD* V, 416n8. Balthasar adds the thought-provoking statement that Jean Corbon "calls the interpenetration of these two 'liturgy.'"

11. *GL* VII, 416.

12. *GL* VII, 417.

13. *TD* V, 420.

14. *TD* V, 420–21.

There have been countless controversies, and several heresies, over the two millennia since the time of Christ over the question of human beings collaborating in God's salvific work. For example, Pelagianism, Jansenism, various forms of Gnosticism and Reformation theology all represent different attitudes toward synergy. Thus, before more fully delineating Balthasar's theology of synergy and its kenotic core, it is necessary to clarify how he explains the very possibility of synergy itself. This can be achieved by briefly exploring facets of his response to Protestant and Orthodox theology on the issue of humanity's "free will" and participation in salvation.

The working of God's grace, or more specifically the meaning of "justification" is an historically critical issue that has caused much division among Christians. Can we somehow earn "merit" before God, increasing our chances of salvation by doing good works? Do we participate in God's salvific work, or do we merely receive it passively as sheer gift, as a forensic declaration conferring an external righteousness? Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox agree that we cannot by mere strength of will turn toward God and be made righteous (let alone be deified); such a view represents the heresy of Pelagianism. God's grace is utterly necessary for salvation, as granted both through Christ's redemption and the action of the Holy Spirit. It is our participation in this movement of God's grace that is the issue: in what *manner* are we transformed into the likeness of God?

Protestant theology commonly puts stress on the depravity of human reason and will as a result of the Fall—echoing Martin Luther's teaching on the "bondage of the will."[15] The *Formula of Concord*, which is a core part of Lutheran confessional writings, states:

> We believe that in spiritual and divine things the intellect, heart, and will of unregenerated man cannot by any native or natural powers in any way understand, believe, accept, imagine, will, begin, accomplish, do, effect, or cooperate, but that man is entirely and completely dead and corrupted as far as anything good is concerned.[16]

15. For example, J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, in affirming the core principles that Luther sets out in his work, *The Bondage of the Will*, state: "We are compelled to ask ourselves: If Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, is any other position than Luther's possible? Surely no more important or far-reaching question confronts the church today" (Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 61).

16. *Book of Concord*, 521. Needless to say, due to the breadth and complexity of the grace/nature debate, particularly since the time of the Reformation, an adequate discussion on this issue is beyond the scope of this work, thus the brief synopsis in this study is for illustrative purposes only. Furthermore, it is important to note that the theologians of the Lutheran confessional documents disagreed even among themselves on the issue of synergy resulting in contradictory expressions of the issue. For example,

This anthropological perspective, which is significantly more negative than Catholic and Orthodox conceptions of human nature, is likewise expressed in the weekly communal confession that "we are by nature sinful and unclean" in Lutheran liturgies.[17] This highlights a crucial issue: the universal ("catholic") tradition has consistently affirmed otherwise—that we are not sinful *by nature*, but were created very *good*, indeed in the *imago Dei*, by nature. As Aquinas asserts (following Augustine), sin has no true existence "by nature," but is simply the deprivation of good.[18] The danger of overstating humanity's fallen nature is that it readily leads to a passive, and hence impoverished conception of divine-human synergy. As Paul Gavrilyuk observes:

> The broader patristic context of *theosis* . . . presupposes certain anthropological assumptions and practices conducive to deification. Patristic authors commonly assume that ascetic struggle and participation in the sacramental life of the Church are prerequisites of deification. Such an assumption in turn depends upon the synergistic understanding of the operation of grace and free will, as well as a "high" view of the sacraments. In most discussions of deification in the Western authors these anthropological and sacramental assumptions are conveniently ignored.[19]

The thought of the Lutheran theologian Carl Braaten, whose perspective on this issue represents a significant strand of traditional Lutheran theology, highlights the divergence of views on synergy when in his book *Principles of Lutheran Theology* he conveys his understanding of the nature of reciprocity between God and humanity. In his thought, the suggestion that God may be pleased with someone's efforts to be obedient and respond with a particular blessing too easily conveys the "notion of a bartering God and a bargain religion."[20] In the same vein, Braaten repeats the conviction

---

paragraph 65 of the same article quoted above states that "as soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit, even though we still do so in great weakness." Nevertheless, in article IV the authors insist that good works are *not* necessary for salvation (22) and should not be "dragged into the article of justification" (37).

17. *Lutheran Service Book*, s.v. "Divine Service I."

18. *ST* I.49.

19. Gavrilyuk, "Retrieval of Deification," 652.

20. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology,* 144. While Braaten's view is too extreme in rejecting any notion of reward, it *is* applicable to those who have a *quid pro quo* mentality regarding good works. As Balthasar notes: "Many look upon divine grace

of Martin Luther when he states that "it is nothing less than blasphemy to tie salvation to one's own good works, for that detracts from the sufficiency of Christ and leads to boasting."[21] In this framework of belief, Catholic and Orthodox conceptions of synergy cannot but appear to be highly questionable, and may even be considered anathema to the gospel by demeaning God's grace via emphasizing the necessity of human effort. As the Protestant theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen has noted, for Lutherans "Eastern soteriology entertains problematic notions of the freedom of will, too positive an anthropology, and, worst of all, the idea of human-divine synergia in salvation."[22] These perceived "problems" are apparent in the *Augsburg Confession*, a seminal Reformation document, when it states that practices such as "particular holy days, prescribed fasts, brotherhoods, pilgrimages, services in honor of saints, rosaries, monasticism, and the like" are "childish and needless works."[23]

If indeed synergy could be characterized as a mere human attempt to achieve salvation through one's efforts, then all orthodox Christians throughout the ages would applaud such a condemnation of "works," since such an understanding would make Christ's redemption of humanity superfluous. However, synergy has never traditionally been understood in that way, and it was long ago (the early fifth century) that the Church universally condemned Pelagius as a heretic for such views. Furthermore, synergy has never been conceived as a symmetrical relationship—as if God and man contributed in an equal way to salvation. Nevertheless, while our efforts are trifles compared to God's saving grace, they do in fact mean *something*.[24]

---

as a kind of anonymous, featureless life we hold within ourselves and are able, by our own efforts, to 'increase,' as we can enlarge a pool by damming it or add to our wealth by saving" (Balthasar, *Prayer*, 17).

21. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 141.

22. Kärkkäinen, "Ecumenical Potential," 45.

23. *Book of Concord*, 41, citing the *Augsburg Confession* XX.3. This statement must be read within the context of Luther's complaint that the Church at the time was focusing too much on works as the means of salvation, to the neglect of the centrality of faith and grace. Yet these "works," particularly venerating the saints, still divide Protestant from Catholic and Orthodox thought and practice. Karl Barth for example gives voice to a common complaint when he cynically questions "whether in all the spiritual splendour of the saints who are supposed to represent and repeat Him Jesus Christ has not ceased—not in theory but in practice—to be the object and origin of Christian faith." For Barth (like Braaten), the ever-present danger is that "the doctrine of justification is absorbed into that of sanctification—understood as the pious work of self-sanctification which man can undertake and accomplish in his own strength" (Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 768).

24. "Luther said: we cannot add anything. And this is true. And then he said: our acts thus do not count for anything. And this is not true, because the Lord's generosity

As Balthasar rightly asserts, God "does not stand aloof in contempt for the things of this world," and thus the "sweat and blood of man [are] not in vain; God acting freely salvages everything when the world is cast in its final and perfect form."[25] Indeed, as Daniel Keating rightly emphasizes, it is the theme of deification itself that supremely *prevents* "works" from becoming a form of self-righteousness that detracts from Christ's salvific work:

> Deification deflects a Pelagian tendency, not by curbing the power of human freedom, but by exhibiting that our destiny in God is so clearly one that we could not even hope to attain by created capacities alone or by the exercise of our wills. Only God can deify, and so only God by his effective indwelling and grace can bring us to our true end.[26]

Theologies which underscore humanity's depravity and as a corollary its inability to respond to grace can end up denying the very purpose God intended for humanity: to live out the dignity of being created in the *imago Dei* by participating in God's desire for human *theosis*; to seek union with God through a freely embraced synergy. The fact that God will not impose salvation requires that humanity respond to His grace by coming to Christ with hope and an active faith.

Despite the foregoing, within the Reformation tradition there are scholars who maintain that Martin Luther himself espoused a theology of deification. For example, the "Finnish school," represented chiefly by Tuomo Mannermaa, has sought to expand and reinterpret Luther's conception of "justification" beyond simply the topic of God's grace manifested in the forgiveness of sins to participation in the divine life.[27] This school makes use of various passages in Luther's writings that express the theme of humanity's participation in God through Christ, such as the famous bridal analogy in his work *Freedom of a Christian* where Luther states that faith

> unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh . . . it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has

---

is revealed precisely in his invitation to us to enter and also gives value to our being with him" (Benedict XVI, "Lenten Meeting").

25. Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 82.

26. Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 123.

27. For a summary of this research, see Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ*; Mannermaa, "*Theosis* as a Subject."

> as though it were his own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own.[28]

However, while the approach of this school may be ecumenically fruitful in seeking common ground, the veracity of its claims are questionable, for not only does Luther's inconsistency of thought on the theme seem to be downplayed, but also his often strident rejection of the possibility of synergy between God and humanity regarding salvation.[29] This is evidenced, for example, in what Luther considered his magnum opus, "The Bondage of the Will," where he consistently exhorts in various ways that "in all that bears on salvation or damnation, [man] has no 'free-will,' but is a captive, prisoner and bondslave, either to the will of God, or to the will of Satan."[30] As Harry McSorley correctly attests in commenting on this work, "even though Luther's necessitarian concept of unfree will can be interpreted in a non-deterministic sense, and therefore in a sense compatible with Trent, the fact that Luther excludes man's free cooperation in saving faith makes his teaching on this point unacceptable not only to Trent, but also to the Lutheran confessional statements, as well as to the overwhelming majority of Protestant theologians, Lutherans included."[31]

28. Luther, *Freedom of a Christian*, 62.

29. Can the school's assertion that Luther taught a "real-ontic" participation in God be harmonized with any conception of forensic justification? As Paul Gavrilyuk points out: "Mannermaa's insistence that *theosis* is a 'foundational structure' in Luther's theology, whatever the historical merits of such a claim, has had the impact of casting in a very different light, perhaps even rendering incoherent, the Lutheran doctrine of forensic justification. Therefore, the uncovering of *theosis* in Luther should not be misread as a benign ecumenical exercise. . . . Justification is no longer a 'legal fiction;' *theosis* is now a species of justification" (Gavrilyuk, "Retrieval of Deification," 655).

30. Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 107. "Luther calls the doctrine of the unfree will the '*res ipas*' and the '*summa causae*' of his teaching . . . the doctrine of the unfree will is just as important and central for Luther as his teaching on justification. For if the doctrine of justification is the article on which the Church stands or falls, then the doctrine of the unfree will is the *foundation* of the article on which the Church stands and falls" (McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?,* 10–11).

31. McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?*, 21. It therefore seems surprising that Braaten, who in many ways (as noted) adheres to a forensic notion of justification and demeans the salvific value of "good works," has acclaimed the work of the Finnish school, particularly as editor of the above work, *Union with Christ*. It seems this is possible only if the term "deification" is being used in its broadest possible sense, as an eschatological theme rather than a doctrine that has manifold anthropological ramifications.

The *Admirabile Commercium*

Traditionally, the Church in both the East and West has always affirmed the free will of the human person, and hence the possibility of cooperating with God's grace. The notion of the *admirable commercium* ("wondrous exchange")—a vital and prevalent theme among the Church Fathers—is a *sine qua non* for interpreting Christ's redemption, and likewise finds a place at the heart of the theology of deification. In a section of his work on soteriology where he discusses the concept of "substitution," Balthasar addresses Luther's understanding of the meaning of the *admirabile commercium*, and as a result his view on the role of participation in salvation (i.e., synergy). He argues that Luther's conception diminishes its depth of meaning, emptying it of salvific potency, for it is not about the "exchange of divine and creaturely nature," as taught by the Fathers, which emphasizes Christ as the Head of all humanity; rather, "the exchange is [reduced to that] between the sinner and Christ."[32] Luther's concept of the *commercium* can be summarized as follows: "Christ's 'becoming sin' is matched by man's becoming righteous through faith alone (*sola fide*)."[33] To state this more broadly, Luther holds that Christ is damned, forsaken, experiences genuine fear of hell, and even takes upon himself all of hell's punishment; humanity's only response to this "exchange" of Christ taking our place is having faith that this is so. As Balthasar notes, the consequences of such a theology of the *commercium* are detrimental to any theology of *theosis*: "in reducing theology to the *pro nobis* between Christ and sinners, Luther obscures the entire horizon of God's self-disclosure in Christ, everything the Father understood by *oikonomia* and the "divinization" of man through grace of participation."[34] The inevitable result is that "the aspect of divinization is relegated completely."[35]

In Balthasar's thought we see an emphasis on traditional understandings of justification as an active, collaborative reality: "the Spirit's work of justifying and sanctifying the sinner is a dynamic process (and not a sudden or dialectical event, as the Reformers largely assumed) . . . [which] signifies a constant pressing on (Phil 3:12), so that the grace accompanying the

32. *TD* IV, 284.

33. *TD* IV, 288.

34. *TD* IV, 290.

35. *TD* IV, 284. There are of course many exceptions to classical conceptions of justification within Protestantism. For example, the United Methodist Pauline scholar Michael J. Gorman argues that for St. Paul there is an integral link between holiness of life and deification: "Holiness is redefined as participation in and conformity to the cruciform character of the triune God, Father, Son and Spirit. Holiness is not a supplement to justification but the actualization of justification, and may be more appropriately termed theosis" (Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God,* 2).

process remains constantly active and effective (*gratia cooperans*)."[36] While this "pressing on" inherently involves "free will," Balthasar fully affirms the necessity of underscoring the primacy of God's grace in the process. For example, in upholding the assertion of Clement of Alexandria that God "wishes us to be saved on the basis of our own decision," Balthasar underscores that synergism "has nothing to do with Pelagianism. When we ourselves realize the good, this is not 'self-realization': ultimately, as in Irenaeus, it is obedience, only possible within God's foreknowledge, within his elective and perfecting *pronoia*."[37] Going further along these lines, Balthasar stresses that "the first Adam is not perfectible in himself; he must die to himself if he is to be lifted to the level of the Second and incorporated with him."[38] Thus, any discussion of participation in grace has an inherently kenotic element—an essential emphasis that should assuage Protestant fears of self-righteousness or Prometheanism in discussions on this theme.

Synergy should not, therefore, be primarily conceived as an intellectual or moral (e.g., growth in the virtues), or even a contemplative endeavor; rather, it is God's endeavor—chiefly a gift of grace. In countering the theology of Karl Barth, which Balthasar believes conveys an understanding of grace akin to Luther's above (i.e., where righteousness is externally imputed), he speaks of God's grace as a deifying transformation: "God's grace is a participation in his inner divine life. As such, it raises the creature above and beyond any claims or longings it might possess. This participation is neither purely forensic nor purely eschatological; rather it is real, internal and present. It is an event that effects a transformation of the very being of the creature."[39] Thus, human participation in the process of *theosis* should first be characterized as being "open" or receptive to this grace according to Balthasar. Even our understanding of the human will itself must recognize that receptivity to God's action is more central than the proactivity of human effort.[40] Along these lines, within a discussion about the believer's growing participation in God's life, Balthasar describes the human person

36. *TL* III, 233.

37. *TD* II, 217. The Greek πρόνοια is usually translated as 'care' or 'forethought.'

38. *TD* IV, 476.

39. *KB*, 377.

40. Timothy McDermott, a Dominican theologian, explains that in the theology of Aquinas "the basic conception of will is not one of a power exercised freely and autonomously on things, but of the ability to *be drawn* by the objective goodness of things as such, within and beyond any particular attractions to particular goods that may be built in to us in our bodily nature. There is therefore a conception of freedom involved in the notion of will, a freedom *from* determination by any particular good, though at the same time, of course, there is a determination towards goodness as such" (McDermott, *Summa Theologiae,* 169–70).

becoming "the space in which the archetype dwells and develops its power as grace."[41] It is this indwelling by "God's triune divinity" that makes synergy possible—in fact it "makes all things possible" (Matt 19:26):

> It is meaningless to attempt to exclude carefully every collaboration of the creature's freedom within the indwelling divine freedom, in order to avoid any appearance of synergism. For God's affirmation of his creature in the accomplishment of his covenant does not in the least aim at bringing the powers of the creature to silence and replacing them: rather, his aim is to empower them through the indwelling of his own working to an activity that lies beyond any capacity of their own for working.[42]

However, the language of "power" is not the best way to convey the nature of synergy in Balthasar's theology, for he emphasizes that the way of synergy is inherently the way of kenosis, since the path of deification always means following Christ:

> In the descent of the Son and his return to the Father, we come to know the relation, now become manifest, between the Son and the Father. We know it as the way we have to follow to reach the Father through the Son. It is the way of renunciation of our own willing and thinking, surrendering them to loving obedience in faith, not, indeed, as our own work but the "work" of the Father in us (John 6:28–29).[43]

Synergy in Orthodoxy

In striking contrast to common Protestant understandings of synergy outlined above, Byzantine theology has always accentuated the essential goodness of human nature and its capacity for cooperation with and through God's grace. As St. Maximus explains, "To the inherent goodness of the image is added the likeness (cf. Gen 1:26) acquired by the practice of virtue and the exercise of the will."[44] The Fall does not take precedence as the defining principle of anthropology, rather the Incarnation, as Leonid Ouspensky, the Orthodox theologian and iconographer, explains:

> By assuming human nature, Christ impregnated it with grace, making it participate in divine life, and cleared the way to the

41. *GL* VII, 310.
42. *GL* VII, 310.
43. Balthasar, *Prayer*, 149–50.
44. Maximus, *Ambiguum 7* (*PG* 91:1084A), quoted in Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, 59.

> Kingdom of God for man, the way of deification and transfiguration. . . . He destroyed the power of original sin by His freely-accepted passion and led man to realize the task for which he was created: to achieve divine likeness.[45]

Here grace does not simply "justify" the sinner through an external "covering over" of sin, but "impregnates" the sinner and destroys sin through Christ's presence within, making deification possible through one's participation in grace. This is a transfiguring process from within, not a forensic declaration from without. Balthasar's theology of synergy is far more akin to the Byzantine tradition than the Protestant, rooted as it is in the patristic tradition exemplified by St. Maximus.

Since in Orthodox theology the human will was damaged by the Fall yet nevertheless preserves its God-gifted freedom (especially after its renewal via baptism into Christ's death and resurrection), "good works" are not only possible, but essential for humanity's participation in God's salvific work. Thus, in the East both the contemplative and ascetic components of Christian life are emphasized as invaluable for all followers of Christ. This is manifest in the texts of the *Philokalia*—the preeminent spiritual anthology in the eastern tradition—where the primary emphasis is on "inner work, on the cleansing of 'the inside of the cup and plate, so that their outside may also be clean' (Matt 23:26). This does not mean that what one might call outer work—the keeping of the commandments and the practice of the moral virtues—is of no importance. On the contrary, such work is a pre-condition of that purification without which no real progress in inner work can be made."[46] While this emphasis on "outer work" may seem semi-Pelagian to some traditions in the West, it is essential to point out that the self-understanding of the Church Fathers is always grounded in full recognition of God's grace as the catalyst, means and end of any human effort. St. Maximus faithfully represents the tradition when he explains that "all the achievements of the saints were clearly gifts of grace from God. None of the saints had the least thing other than the goodness granted to him by the Lord God according to the measure of his gratitude and love. And what he acquired he acquired only in so far as he surrendered himself to the Lord who bestowed it."[47]

This reciprocal relationship between grace and works is consistently reflected in the spiritual writings of both the East and West. One significant accent in the Orthodox understanding of synergy, however, particularly

45. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 157.

46. Palmer et al., *Philokalia*, 1:14.

47. Palmer et al., *Philokalia*, 2:216.

serves to highlight the distinctiveness of Balthasar's theology. It is exemplified in a famous story concerning *theosis* which consists of a conversation between Nicholas Motovilov and St. Seraphim of Sarov in the forests of Russia on a winter day in 1831. The narrative highlights two prevalent themes in the Byzantine theology of synergy: namely the manifestation of the "Taboric light" and the exhortation to "acquire the Holy Spirit." The key exchange begins with a question asked by Motovilov, "How can I know the Spirit is with me, in me?" St. Seraphim responds by sharing various spiritual insights, trying to reassure Motovilov of the Spirit's presence in his life, when a miracle of transfiguration takes place:

> Then Father Seraphim took me very firmly by the shoulders and said: "We are now both in God's Spirit! Why do you not look at me?"
>
> I answered: "I can't, father, because lightning is streaming from your eyes. Your face has become brighter than the sun, and my eyes are splitting with pain."
>
> Father Seraphim said: "Don't be afraid. You too have now become as bright as I. You too are now in the fullness of God's Spirit. Otherwise you could not see me as I am now" . . .
>
> I looked at his face and was seized by an even greater fear and trembling. Imagine in the middle of the sun, dazzling in the brilliance of its noontide rays, the face of the man who is speaking to you.[48]

The experience of the "Taboric light" is not unusual in the Byzantine tradition—indeed, it reflects the hesychast belief that God's deifying "energies" can be palpable, that God's glorification of humanity can take an overt form. However, for our purposes what is even more significant to highlight is the discussion between St. Seraphim and Motovilov before and after this transfiguration. It has to do with St. Seraphim's explanation of the goal of Christian life: "Prayer, fasting, vigils and all other Christian exercises . . . however good in themselves are not the goal of our Christian life, although they are necessary means to its attainment. The true goal of Christian life consists in the acquisition of the Holy Spirit."[49] When Motovilov asks for further explanation, St. Seraphim replies:

> The goal of the worldly life of the ordinary man is the acquisition of money. In addition noblemen want honors, decorations and other rewards for their service to the state. The acquisition of the Spirit of God is also capital but eternal capital, full of

48. Florensky, *Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 75–76.

49. Bolshakoff, *Russian Mystics*, 130.

> grace. This capital is gained in much the same way as money and temporal honors.[50]

In Seraphim's understanding of deification, synergy is chiefly about obtaining the Holy Spirit, or "grace." God's grace is perceptible, quantifiable; it can be "acquired" and "accumulated" by doing specific spiritual acts, for example by prayer and practicing the virtues.[51]

This popular story in the Orthodox tradition typifies a conception of synergy significantly different in emphasis from that of Balthasar regarding the matter of both perceiving and participating in God's grace. Firstly, regarding overt manifestations of the glory of deification, Balthasar is unfailingly reticent, downplaying even Jesus' glorification on Mt. Tabor (as discussed, *supra*), and simply affirms that the fullness of the glory of believers will be revealed with Christ's return.[52] He consistently stresses the inherent hiddenness of spiritual development. For example, in referring to the theology of John of Ruysbroeck he states that "the highest degree of divine favor and the greatest purity of soul are required if the soul is to discern this divine process, since it is beyond the soul's spiritual and intellectual faculties."[53] Furthermore, as we will discuss shortly, he focuses on a very different form of glory: participating in the veiled glory of Christ, characterized by obscurity and suffering.[54]

Balthasar generally considers the Byzantine tradition as too focused on the "other-worldly" vision of the transcendent, to the neglect of the "here and now" social mission of the Church. As we observed in his article "The Fathers, Scholastics, and Ourselves," he assiduously stresses the importance of remaining rooted in a continual awareness of creatureliness so as not become too tempted by Gnostic-oriented upward strivings for the Godhead.

50. Bolshakoff, *Russian Mystics*, 131.

51. St. Seraphim advises Motovilov: "Acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit with all the other virtues. For Christ's sake, trade with those which give you the highest return. Gather the capital of divine grace, put it into the divine eternal bank" (Bolshakoff, *Russian Mystics*, 132–33).

52. Raymond Gawronski conveys a more negative interpretation: "Balthasar is quite critical of the Hesychast focus on the vision of the light of Tabor, as this was but one episode in the life of Jesus and one which, moreover, moved towards directing the attention towards the Passion of Christ" (Gawronski, *Word and Silence*, 106).

53. *TD* V, 390.

54. Of course, Byzantine theology also expresses kenotic interpretations of the Holy Spirit's work, as attested for example in the writings of the Orthodox missionary and Metropolitan of Moscow, St. Innocent: "The Holy Spirit confers true humility . . . when the Holy Spirit enters the heart of man, he shows him all his inner poverty and weakness, the corruption of his soul and heart, and his remoteness from God. . . . In brief, the Holy Spirit shows everything in its true aspect" (Chariton, *Art of Prayer,* 232).

Thus, in an essay focusing on the way truth is conveyed and received via the five senses (i.e., a discussion of Christian phenomenology), Balthasar offers the following insight on the more mystical understanding of synergy of the eastern Church:

> *Theosis,* deification, is the ultimate cry, the ultimate goal of Eastern Christianity, because it is the ultimate meaning of pure vision. This is why the East aims at (mystic-supernatural) identity, and why monophysitism is the genuinely Eastern heresy. . . . The Eastern Church became heretical because she handed herself over to the absolutization of the inner dynamism of the act of seeing, which points ultimately, in its upward flight, to identity with God and to negation of the world. . . . It is only where this upward flight toward identity remains bound to the form of the abiding, objective separateness, so that the basic form of creatureliness and thus an intellectual position of hearing is maintained, that the Eastern form of Christian piety remains something that cannot be lost within the sphere of the Church.[55]

It is clear that for Balthasar synergy must be "grounded," with a "worldly character" that provides balance to any overemphasis on the desire for "pure vision."[56] Nevertheless, his more down-to-earth stance is highly qualified for he goes on in the same passage to assert that, likewise, immanentism—the "heresy" of the western Church—must be avoided, for it leads to the idolatry of activism and a losing sight of the Church's very mission.[57] In fact, he believes that the Eastern Church "can teach us secularized Westerners" regarding our "spiritual perception and encounter with God," helping to open our "inner eyes" and ears more fully.[58]

Secondly, comparing St. Seraphim's exhortation to "acquire" the Holy Spirit with the general thrust of Balthasar's theology of synergy, we discover another significant difference of emphasis. For Balthasar, the language of acquisition is entirely absent, rather synergy is primarily about being "handed

55. *EXP* II, 483. The essay is entitled "Seeing, Hearing, and Reading within the Church," 473–90. Regarding the problem of Monophysitism, Dumitru Staniloae provides an Orthodox response: "Roman Catholicism many times claims that the Eastern doctrine of deification is Monophysitism. But because all the Fathers of the Church accentuate that deification is 'by grace, not by nature,' it is cleared of this accusation. God 'by grace,' not by nature, means precisely that the nature of deified man remains unchanged, in the sense that it doesn't itself become the source of divine energies; it has them by grace received as a gift" (Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 371).

56. *EXP* II, 483.

57. *EXP* II, 484–86.

58. *EXP* II, 488–89.

over." This is particularly evident in a passage in the seventh volume of *The Glory of the Lord,* where he discusses the Old Testament promise that God will write his law of love on our hearts so that we can truly come to know him. Balthasar stresses that it is the movement of "handing over oneself," of *expropriation*, that characterizes God's redeeming action and hence also humanity's synergy in coming to union with God:

> This law (of love) is the Spirit: he himself. It is therefore he himself who puts himself in our heart. But by handing himself over to us in this way, he reveals himself as the one he is: the Father who from the beginning has made the gift of himself to his Son, and who has carried on this handing over of himself up to the place and condition that are ours: to the point of becoming man and of being lost. It is therefore not possible to take God to oneself through an act of appropriating him, because God is personified handing-over, and one 'knows' him and "possesses" him only when one is oneself expropriated and handed over. . . . The truth that affirms the human person and takes possession of him requires that one be ready to be taken hold of and to give up control over oneself to another.[59]

Not only is coming to know God *not* about somehow "acquiring" him, according to Balthasar—for it is "not possible to take God to oneself through an act of appropriating him"—it is primarily about being "taken hold of" and giving up control over oneself.[60] For Balthasar the only true "acquisition" one can thus speak of is a paradoxical gaining of a spirit of kenosis:

> When the individual believer is drawn into the whole Church, he is baptized "into the death" of Christ (Rom 6:3), in order to be led down into a depth and definitiveness of self-surrender that remains unattainable for him as a limited human being but which he makes his aim in the act of faith and which he longs to see carried out, because he wishes to "appropriate" to himself

59. *GL* VII, 400. Italics mine.

60. Ruth Burrows, the Carmelite spirituality author, speaks of the same reality: "For God to 'touch' me, however lightly, means I suffer. I begin to shrivel up, to experience something of my sinfulness and total helplessness. . . . What is more, I know that I can never know him and never come to him. It is then that I really experience that I need Jesus and everything depends on my living this out, letting go of the controls, handing them over to him and accepting to have no holiness, no achievement of my own, to be before God as nothing. This is to die so that Jesus becomes my all" (Burrows, *Essence of Prayer*, 38–39).

> the total self-giving of God, opening up the whole space for it and giving it the adequate response which it intends.[61]

Thus, while grace cannot be "acquired" in Balthasar's understanding of synergy, what can be acquired is the losing of self, an even greater depth of kenosis that reflects God's kenotic nature. In this sense the St. Seraphim story above is commensurate with Balthasar's conception in that it takes place within the context of a life immersed in self-surrender: the "acquisition" of grace occurs via practicing the virtues and is understood as a corollary of the radical expropriation of monastic asceticism. That being said, Balthasar is ambivalent and even at times wary about placing too much emphasis on human effort for it can too easily be falsely conceived as a kind of smug "guarantee" of one's spiritual progress. In fact, he even at times advocates a kenotic passivity and "indifference" above ascetic activity: "It is as if to renounce all efforts to achieve wholeness is precisely to practice wholeness itself, as if God is nowhere nearer than in the humility and poverty of indifference, in the openness to death, in the renunciation of every hold on or attempt to make certain of God."[62] Overall, Balthasar's primary concern is to place far more emphasis on the initiative for expropriation coming from Christ's self-surrender, not human effort: "The primary reality is, not man's movement from below up to the absolute, in order, if possible, to disappear in it, but rather, as Ignatius of Loyola emphatically repeats, the movement *de arriba*, coming down from above, in which God empties himself out in order to fill man up with *his* loving self-expropriation.[63]

While St. Seraphim's teaching on the acquisition of the Holy Spirit is a key example of the general thrust of Byzantine spirituality, it must of course be viewed within the fullness of the eastern tradition that often more fully resonates with Balthasar's emphasis. For example, the perspective of Theophan the Recluse closely coincides with his in the following passage:

> The Lord always wants us to have whatever will help us most towards salvation, and He is ready to give it to us at all times: He only waits for our readiness or capacity to receive it. Therefore the question of what we must do to safeguard this help is transformed into another: what must we do to keep ourselves in *readiness* to receive the protecting power of God, which is waiting to enter us? And how in fact does this power enter into us? It is essential to recognize ourselves as empty, an empty vessel containing nothing; to add to this the consciousness of our own

61. *GL* VII, 405.
62. *TA*, 101.
63. *TL* II, 283.

> powerlessness to fill this emptiness by any effort of our own; to crown this by the certitude that the Lord alone can do it, and not only can but wants to and knows how.[64]

In Theophan's understanding of synergy reflected here, the language of acquisition is absent, replaced by the language of reception—of a growing capacity to receive God's grace. Rather than focusing on self-effort, he stresses the need for kenotic readiness, and the sheer giftedness of salvation. This parallels Balthasar's conception of transformation—becoming conformed to Christ—which is brought about not "primarily [as] the result of one's own endeavours, but [as] the result of permitting the actively shaping power of God in Christ to work."[65] It is an "act of stripping and clothing," and "letting God 'teach' oneself."[66]

64. Chariton, *Art of Prayer,* 262.
65. *GL* VII, 294.
66. *GL* VII, 294.

12

The Exploding of the "I"

God's grace operates by "crowning and perfecting man's attempts, precisely because it first shatters and overturns them."[1]

The brief comparative overview in the last chapter of various understandings of synergy in the Christian tradition provides us with a helpful context from which to more fully evaluate Balthasar's contribution on the subject. As we have seen, synergy in his thought is far less about human discipline and effort than a "letting go," an *ekstasis* of the self, a participation in powerlessness which is modeled after Christ. Thus, the fundamental rationale explaining the necessity for synergy between God and humanity is God's own kenosis:

> Man's freedom is left intact, even when perverted into sin. This has been a patristic theologoumenon since the time of Irenaeus: God does not overwhelm man; he leads him to his goals *peithei*, *suadelā*. This indicates no inability on God's part; it is not that he is uncertain whether he can convince rebellious man. It arises from the power-lessness that, as we have seen, is identical with his omnipotence: he is above the necessity to dominate, let alone use violence.[2]

1. *WR*, 24.

2. *TD* IV, 331. Balthasar speaks about God's loving "persuasion" of humanity, using first the Greek (from the root πείθω), then the Latin term.

To put it succinctly, humanity's freedom is necessary if there is to be a true relationship of love between God and humanity; and this gift of freedom arises from God's very nature as Persons in kenotic relationship. Synergy between God and humanity is God's desire, based on His self-giving way of being. One could go further to emphasize that this granting of human freedom is also the natural result of God's desire that human beings develop into kenotic creatures themselves, coming to more fully express their creation as the *imago Dei* and hence come to greater perfection of being. God invites and persuades in order to guide and train humanity in His kenotic ways.

At the end of the fifth volume of *Herrlichkeit*, where Balthasar concludes his exploration of Christian metaphysics by discussing the relationship between God and the world, he describes God as "self-giving absolute Being" who makes himself "poor" in communicating his "fullness and poverty" to all creation.[3] Within this discussion we discover a compelling passage which in many ways encapsulates his understanding of what the fullness of being the *imago Dei* truly means:

> God-given Being is both fullness and poverty at the same time: fullness as Being without limit, poverty modelled ultimately on God Himself, because He knows no holding on to Himself, poverty in the act of Being which is given out, which *as* gift delivers itself without defence (because here too it does not hold on to itself) to the finite entities. . . . [The finite subject] constitutes itself as such through the letting-be of Being by virtue of an *ekstasis* out of its own closed self, and therefore through dispossession and poverty becomes capable of salvaging in recognition and affirmation the infinite poverty of the fullness of Being and, within it, that of the God who does not hold on to Himself.[4]

Again we encounter the consistent paradox in Balthasar's theology that fullness of being—both in God and humanity—is defined in and through kenosis. To be a human being means to reflect God's Being, and this occurs chiefly through self-giving and poverty. This kenosis of self is what "constitutes" the mature, whole human person. It is this very quality, or way of being, that affirms the truth and presence of God in our lives and in the world; i.e., in being kenotic we reveal God. Furthermore (and perhaps even more importantly), Balthasar goes on to assert that *only* via this medium can the salvific process from God to man take place, that of "predestination,

3. *GL* V, 624–27.
4. *GL* V, 626–27.

election, vocation, justification, sanctification, glorification (Rom 8:28–30), for all these are *modi* of radiant and universal love."[5]

Balthasar's emphasis is of course expected given that his conception of synergy is chiefly about participating in the process of being recreated not only in the *imago Dei*, but more particularly in the *imago Christi*. It is reminiscent of St. Paul's great desire to "gain Christ," which for him means knowing "the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Phil 3:10–11). It is the way of the Cross: "the Cross is not considered in isolation [in the New Testament], but as the embodiment and summing up of the entire lifework of Jesus. For the act of self-giving 'is the last and greatest act of his service,' held up by Jesus before his disciples repeatedly and urgently as an example, and impressed upon them."[6] As such, it seems clear that Balthasar's kenotic, Christological characterization of synergy takes its cue from his early mentor Erich Przywara, who in *Analogia Entis* writes:

> "Deification" as "participation in the divine nature and person" comes about essentially by "participation in God's mission," that is, by participation in God's "incarnation," and this to the point of the abasement and emptiness of the powerlessness of the flesh in the scandal of the cross. . . . Thus the full law of "deification" reads: As Christ is essentially the descending God, so too the ascent of our "participation in God" occurs solely through participation in God's descent. The glory of God (the core of deification) is found within the scandal of the cross (the core of redemption).[7]

Yet Balthasar much more fully develops what is only nascent in Przywara's thought. On the one hand, he is careful to stress that "the *kenosis* and *diastasis* of Christ cannot be imitated"; on the other hand, however, "a possible configuration to them lies in making oneself empty of oneself (cf. Matt 5:8) in order to be filled by the active 'image' of the love of God in Christ which imprints itself on one."[8] Or, as he puts it in his theodramatics, "the '*imago*' has been created for the sake of the '*similitudo*,' not in order to develop

5. *GL* V, 627.

6. *GL* VII, 149–50.

7. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 368.

8. *GL* VII, 294. St. Augustine conveys the same sentiments: "God means to fill each of you with what is good; so cast out what is bad! If he wishes to fill you with honey and you are full of sour wine, where is the honey to go? The vessel must be emptied of its contents and then be cleansed. Yes, it must be cleansed even if you have to work hard and scour it. It must be made fit for the new thing, whatever it may be" (*Liturgy of the Hours,* 3:221).

toward it by its own self-perfection or through a dialectical process, but to serve as a place where the divine Archetype [*Urbild*] can be implanted."[9] Whether Balthasar speaks of love "imprinting" itself or the "implanting" of Christ's very being in one's life, both are far more about kenotic receptivity than human effort. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, whose theology often resonates with Balthasar's, cogently summarizes this point: "the Cross is but the definitive radicalization of that gesture which the Son is. Not the grasping audacity of Prometheus but the Son's obedience on the Cross is the place where man's divinization is accomplished. Man can become God, not by making himself God, but by allowing himself to be made 'Son.'"[10]

Nevertheless, allowing oneself to be formed, to be "emptied" and "implanted" by Christ's being implies effort on the part of the disciple, and receptivity of spirit is awoken and nurtured via the ascetic life. Although the whole idea of 'ascetics' is unfortunately too often negatively skewed in our era, connoting excessive psychological guilt and bodily self-mortification, the original Greek áskēsis (ἄσκησις) which is the focus here, "implied primarily a man who *trained* for something, whether in the field of a trade or an art, of athletics or spiritual endeavour."[11] Balthasar insists that a basic aspect of this "training"—living a life of kenotic synergy—involves "renunciation, a more complete simplicity, nudity and poverty."[12] Furthermore, dispossession of oneself requires a "conscious unveiling" before God, "an attitude of transparency before God that at every moment reaches to the very core of the soul."[13] This of course implies repentance and confession, which are not simply about sloughing off the weight of sins or receiving forgiveness, but are first and foremost means of opening oneself to God.[14] This "unveiling" of the self goes beyond mere acknowledgement of sin to detaching oneself from it:

> The spirit must die in the flesh for the flesh to rise again in the spirit. . . . An important part of this death will consist of personal penance, penance for past sins in which, listening to the voice of the flesh, he was disobedient to the spirit; penance as

9. *TD* III, 527.

10. Ratzinger, *Eschatology,* 64–65.

11. Kadloubovsky and Palmer, *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*, 18.

12. Balthasar, *Prayer*, 130.

13. *TL* I, 269.

14. That is perhaps one reason why the "Jesus Prayer"—the most basic prayer of repentance—is so powerful: if it is prayed honestly and fervently it both necessitates and stimulates the kenotic attitude necessary for deification.

> painful detachment from the senses and faculties of the soul, so that they come to learn what Christianity really means.[15]

Yet in the midst of this emphasis on the ascetic component of synergy, Balthasar is diligent in confirming the necessary qualification that faith and obedience cannot be measured in terms of human performance, for "we do not make any further 'contribution' to God's act [in Christ] but merely accord it its own space."[16] More specifically, "obedience does not take its measure against the power of the human person who makes space, nor against his willingness to work: its measure is the power of God's act of reconciliation, which takes as the 'means of atonement' (Rom 3:25) the hypostatic obedience of the Son of God, his *kenosis*."[17] Thus, faith itself has "christological measurements and dimensions," and it is this fact—not our efforts—that brings about our justification and "truly sets in motion our configuration to God's image, which is the Son."[18] Again, for Balthasar everything is brought back to Christ's salvific act on the cross and his descent to the dead. Faith—our allowing God to act within us, and thus the first prerequisite for our deification—

> can be nothing other than this: to make the whole man a space that responds to the divine content. Faith attunes man to this sound; it confers on man the ability to react precisely to this divine experiment, preparing him to be a violin that receives just this touch of the bow, to serve as material for just this house to be built, to provide the rhyme for just this verse being composed.[19]

It is this kenotic faith (in that its very nature and object are kenotic) that ultimately leads one to a "superabundance of realities . . . (eternal) life, existence as a sharing in God, the pouring-out of the Holy Spirit, knowledge of the revealed depths of God."[20]

15. Balthasar, *Prayer*, 216–17. Adam Cooper notes that in early monastic life in particular asceticism was integrally connected to deification. Voluntary suffering was the means to make one "dead," removing the threat of death: "The voluntary subjection to trial through the active elimination of passionate attachments to the material order, the relentless scrutiny of vain self-opinions of the soul, and the unceasing elevation of one's neighbour and even one's enemies over oneself—all of which from a human perspective look like death, actually spells passage into immortal life" (Cooper, *Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified,* 245).

16. *GL* VII, 304.

17. *GL* VII, 305.

18. *GL* VII, 305.

19. *GL* I, 220.

20. *GL* VII, 307–8.

Being recreated into the *imago Christi,* as discussed in the foregoing chapter on the Trinity, necessarily and ultimately implies an assuming of the *imago trinitatis.* For Balthasar, the kenotic mode of trinitarian life is the key to not only explaining the *way* grace infuses human nature, but also the underlying means by which humanity responds to that grace. In his essay on "Characteristics of Christianity" he focuses on this kenotic synergy of humanity's self-renunciation modeled after the life of the Trinity:

> Faith and love, with which hope is conjoined, are to be understood primarily as the expression of the eternal life communicated to man . . . [and] as understood by the gospels, are inseparable in this life. Faith is the surrender of one's own views, and can be permanent only as the outcome of love and fidelity. It means preferring the divine truth before one's own truth. . . . Love itself is the surrender of one's entire will and being through faith, in the conviction that God merits to be placed first in every respect and is deserving of total surrender; in a trust, too, that in its knowledge surpasses all knowledge. And it is precisely in this *infinite surrender and self-renunciation*, in this absolute preference of the Thou to the I, that the life of the Trinity consists; for it is a life in which the Persons can be conceived only "relatively," that is, through one another.[21]

Humanity's synergy of faith, involving the surrender of the intellect ("one's own views") and the "entire will" is thus about the ultimate surrender of the "I"—emptying oneself of one's ego in preference for the other. Balthasar fittingly defines faith and love not primarily in the context of our response to God, but as expressions of God's grace. They are defined and understood through the very mode of God's inner-trinitarian life. Furthermore, Balthasar implies that while God is infusing us with the theological virtues of faith, hope and love, he is simultaneously granting us the *capacity* to surrender our intellect and will. In other words, in the act of granting gifts of grace to us, God is teaching us to be creatures of self-surrender.

Thus faith, hope and love—the primary virtues which lead to union with God (without which it is impossible)—have a kenotic character according to Balthasar: they not only require self-emptying as a means to this union, but their end is an "infinite self-renunciation" through immersion in the life of the Trinity. He describes the theological virtues not as means of bettering oneself morally, or obtaining merit, but as ways of entering God's life, as means of sharing the kenotic nature of God—as "ways of handing over one's own freedom to God's freedom: they are the ways of entering into

21. *WR*, 33. Italics mine.

God's truth (faith), into his fidelity to his promises (hope) and into his own surrender to us (love)."[22] More specifically, he speaks of faith in particular as opening us up to the divine presence, and hence divinizing us: "Faith's effect of 'unselving' us creates a 'vacant space' that is occupied by Christ and his 'Spirit,' who 'confirms' to us that we, like the Son, are children of the Father, sharing a relation to the Son through the Spirit, so that the *imago trinitatis* is fulfilled in us."[23]

Therefore, what encapsulates the concept of synergy in Balthasar's theology of deification is the losing of the self, the death of the ego: the sinner "is asked to give up his idea of 'self-realization' (using his neighbor—and even God, if necessary—as a means to this end) and actually to lose his self; thus he may gain what, in the real and concrete God, is blessedness. And this blessedness is a Hypostasis who is himself precisely by surrendering to the Other. That is what blessedness consists in."[24] For Balthasar the gaining of eternal "blessedness" occurs not through seeking self-fulfillment but in emptying oneself in order to simply exist in and through Christ. Balthasar implies that kenosis *itself* is blessedness because it is a reflection of Christ's very way of being. Deification is about knowing God in his kenotic Being, sharing his life which is characterized by "surrendering to the Other."

In line with this conviction, Balthasar speaks of the true nature of human perfection as conveying transparency and submission:

> It is at the very moment when the creature most irradiates God's truth and glory, when God is most immanent in the creature, that the creature is least the content and most the shell and vessel. When God most shines through, the creature has to become most transparent. When God lovingly elevates the creature to the loftiest heights, the creature must humble itself in the deepest reverence before him, acknowledging itself to be only a servant and handmaid of the Lord, Thus, the creature cooperates most with God and his revelation when it lets God use it as an instrument for his purposes. The creature is most alive when, by God's life indwelling in it, it submits in the most deathlike

22. *EXP* IV, 440.

23. *TD* V, 334.

24. *TD* V, 294. Joseph Ratzinger echoes Balthasar in asserting that Christ's radical love was a "total exodus from himself, a going-out-from-himself toward the other even to the radical delivery of himself to death . . . the "basic law of all human existence" is thus the call to "transcend and sacrifice the *I*" (Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 189).

> way to the hand of the divine potter. . . . The objectivity of the creature's attitude consists in this withdrawal before God.[25]

Cooperation with God is about the willingness to be a "shell and vessel," to be used as an instrument; true and full life come from submitting in a "deathlike way" to the divine potter, in humble withdrawal. Thus, it also implies a sense of repentance: the recognition of creaturely frailty, imperfection and hence inability to somehow "achieve" godliness through personal effort. This attitude of *metanoia* inherently includes the acknowledgement of one's need for God. There is therefore nothing left of "works righteousness," or any emphasis on "acquiring" grace or the virtues in Balthasar's conception of synergy here. Instead it is in emptying oneself that one truly lives in the *imago Dei* and gives glory to God: "through dispossession and poverty [the finite] becomes capable of salvaging in recognition and affirmation the infinite poverty of the fullness of Being and, within it, that of the God who does not hold on to Himself."[26]

Consequently, when Balthasar discusses the place of our "works" in the context of the fire of judgment (1 Cor 3:11–15)—i.e., that our work will ultimately be "shown for what it is"—he states that "the work made out of wood is a work done to honor one's own ego; this work must be dismantled down to its foundations, and the ego, stripped for its own good of its works, has to learn from the ground up this holy poverty in spirit."[27] The nature of "quality work" is selfless and self-emptying to a radical extent, where the purification process involves "exploding the encapsulated "I."[28] Thus, God's grace does not always come to us gently or peacefully, but in its vital intensity often operates by "crowning and perfecting man's attempts, precisely because it first shatters and overturns them."[29] For Balthasar, the degree in

25. *TL* I, 237. The emphasis must be on the fact that we are God's work, which involves an existential stance of embracing creatureliness, rather than spurning it, as reflected in the writing of St. Irenaeus: "You do not create God; God creates you. Therefore if you are God's work, wait patiently for the hand of your artist, who does everything in due proportion, and in due proportion as regards you who are being made. . . . Keeping the form that has been impressed on you, you will move towards perfection, for the clay that is in you will be hidden by the artist. . . . But if you despise his art and show yourself ungrateful to him because he has made you only human, you despiser of God, then you have forfeited both his art and your life. . . . If, however, you surrender to him what is yours, trusting faith in him and submissiveness, then you will receive his art and become a perfect work of God" (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* IV.39.2, quoted in *GL* II, 74–75).

26. *GL* 5, 627.

27. *EXP* IV, 455.

28. *TD* V, 384.

29. *WR*, 24.

which we accept and embrace this stripping, exploding, and shattering is related to our capacity to endure the purifying fire, and even to our participation in the purification of the world with Christ: "The purification . . . comes to an end when the one whose eyes are transfixed on the One pierced for our sins would be ready to *stay* in the fire for as long as sin (not mine but any sin) is still causing pain in the God-man. . . . Anyone who has reached this level of maturity can enter into the 'communion of saints."[30] The implication in Balthasar's thought is that we finally attain an authentic and full synergy—we become "saints"—when our kenosis is joined to Christ's in his redemptive work.

Therefore, he describes the Christian life of synergy as the appropriation of the "rhythm" of Christ's self-giving.[31] Followers of Christ exist in "the Paschal transition from Good Friday to Easter Sunday."[32] This is a very present, yet hidden reality: "'being crucified to the world' and 'buried with him (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12) does not refer just to a future resurrection with him (Rom 6:8–9) but also to a present resurrection with him, however much it is still hidden with Christ in God . . . unless we are crucified with Christ anew each day, we cannot rise with him."[33] For Balthasar (echoing St. Paul) the believer's life is thus "an eschatological life, bearing the imprint of the most radical dying and the most radical turning to eternal life, not just for a fleeting moment, but constantly."[34]

Given the primacy of place of the doctrine of *theosis* and the centrality of synergy in Byzantine theology, it is worthwhile to note in passing that Balthasar's focus on kenosis as a key facet of synergy is quite common among Orthodox theologians. In fact, Andrew Louth affirms that that emphasis reflects the patristic conception of ascesis, particularly that of St. Maximus the Confessor:

> Our response to the Incarnation, through which we receive deification, imitates the action of the Word in the Incarnation . . . and, in particular, our response involves a κένωσις, a self-emptying, that mirrors the κένωσις through which the Word of God assumed humanity: . . . "by emptying themselves of the

30. *EXP* IV, 456.

31. *GL* VII, 446. Henri de Lubac expresses this rhythm as follows: "The mystery of Christ is ours also. What was accomplished in the Head must be accomplished also in the members. Incarnation, death and resurrection: that is, taking root, detachment and transfiguration. No Christian spirituality is without this rhythm in triple time" (De Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith,* 66).

32. *EXP* IV, 463.

33. *EXP* IV, 464.

34. *TD* V, 333.

> passions they lay hold of the divine to the same degree as that to which, deliberately emptying Himself of His own sublime glory, the Logos of God truly became man."[35]

Likewise, Dumitru Staniloae goes so far as to say that "the emptying out of self is so much the sign of love that without it love cannot be manifested. For in love a person forgets himself and gives himself to the other in a total self-surrender; yet it is precisely through this love that he reveals himself in his own fullness."[36] These theologians, as well as Sergius Bulgakov and Vladimir Lossky[37] already mentioned, corroborate Balthasar's conviction that kenosis paradoxically brings fullness of human life, and defines the path to human perfection.

"Becoming God" in Balthasar's theology is always paradoxically about becoming more *human*, acknowledging and embracing the humility of creatureliness, with its inherent state of dependence on God and others.[38] *Theosis* is ultimately conceived as a "returning home" in Balthasar's theology—both to God and to our true selves as human beings. It is about attaining the likeness of God through Christ, yet because Christ was hypostatically fully God and fully human this means becoming fully human and indeed *remaining* human for eternity. For our creatureliness is a good gift of God (Gen 1:31), an essential aspect of who God created us to be. In the final volume of his theological aesthetics, Balthasar expands on this theme within a commentary on the first chapter of Ephesians, which speaks of believers as having been chosen "before the foundation of the world" and "destined for adoption" by God:

> When we are "transferred" before the foundation of the world to [Christ's] position, this always means for us, not only the return to God as to our home, but the return to our own selves (in the perfected *human being* Jesus Christ), since we are "designated beforehand" by God the Father "to be conformed to the image

35. Louth, "Place of *Theosis*," 38. For a discussion of ascesis in the patristic tradition, see chapters 8–12 in Larchet, *La divinization*.

36. Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 192.

37. E.g., Lossky affirms that "the perfection of the person consists in self-abandonment: the person expresses itself most truly in that it renounces to exist for itself. It is the self-emptying of the Person of the Son, the Divine κένωσις" (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 144).

38. Along these lines, Archimandrite Vasileous of Mt. Athos writes: "Coming into contact with a monk who has reached maturity, one finds nothing superhuman in him, nothing which astonishes or makes one giddy, but rather something deeply human and humble, something which brings peace and new courage . . . he has embraced all men in their suffering, and become truly human" (Vasileous, *Hymn of Entry,* 125–26).

> 'Son of God,'" not in a movement away from our destiny of mortality, but through being shaped into, and indeed growing together with, the archetypal dying and crucifixion, so that we may arrive at the archetypical act in which all humanity is glorified: we are designated beforehand to enter and return home to God as our own dwelling-place, and to our "creaturely" reality, in the Son of God.[39]

The supreme gift of having God as our "dwelling-place" occurs through our incorporation into Christ's kenosis—"being shaped into . . . the archetypal dying and crucifixion." Synergy is thus not about escaping or surpassing matter or mortality, but journeying through it, being receptive to the hand of God the divine potter who shapes our clay into Christ himself. We are God's "work," and this must always be emphasized far more than our work for God. Our efforts and struggles are trifles compared to that which Christ has already accomplished in his suffering and death, and the continuing movement of the Holy Spirit "who overcomes the remaining sinful discrepancy in sinners, not with the easy superiority of God, but with the infinite labor of one who goes into the bleakness, the narrowness, and the stupor of finite and fallen consciousness in order to open it, together with him and on his conditions, to infinite love."[40]

The Synergy of Liturgy

Synergy reaches its apex in worship, which is the highest and noblest of all human activities. As the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* emphasizes, "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows."[41] The liturgy is the summit of humanity's activity because it fulfills the very purpose of human existence, which is to give glory to God. As Alexander Schmemann explains in *For the Life of the World*:

> All rational, spiritual and other qualities of man, distinguishing him from other creatures, have their focus and ultimate fulfillment in [the] capacity to bless God . . . "*Homo sapiens*," "*homo faber*" . . . yes, but, first of all, "*homo adorans*." The first, the basic definition of man is that he is *the priest.* He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by

39. *GL* VII, 397.
40. *TA*, 71.
41. Paul VI, "Sacrosanctum Concilium" 10.

> filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him.[42]

Balthasar fully affirms this sentiment when he states that "the beginning and the end of everything remain the adoring prostration before the One who says, 'It is I, I with whom you are speaking.'"[43] He consistently and repeatedly conveys throughout his writings that the focus of Christian existence is always on knowing and worshipping God above all else. For example, on the first page of his multi-volume work on theological aesthetics he emphasizes that faith begins and develops through "'beholding' the living God": this is what 'transports' the creature beyond itself, that "bears the name of 'grace.'"[44] Prayer and worship epitomize the relationship between God and humanity that deifies. Furthermore, it is essential to note that the liturgy supersedes theology as the primary mode of union with God, as the ancient dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi* conveys.[45]

Consequently, Balthasar stresses that God himself must be the object of faith and worship, not, for example, a (too common) vague sense of "the divine" as the fulfiller of one's wishes: "nothing can be the formal object of the believer's perception of revelation except God, *in so far* as he is *God* and not, for instance, in so far as he is the horizon of the world's origin and goal."[46] Nor, he adds, can the focus of one's faith be on self-perfection, or even serving others: were a Christian to "seek his alleged salvation by turning exclusively to his fellow creatures (Christ's mission has, after all, directed him towards creatures!), such a Christian would, for himself, have already stepped outside the proper sphere of revelation."[47] For Balthasar it is solely through beholding God and experiencing his grace that one becomes capable of the synergy of loving one's neighbor: "A Christian encounters his

42. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 15.

43. Balthasar, *My Work*, 21.

44. *GL* VI, 9.

45. Robert Taft provides a helpful description of the relationship between the two, and their respective expressions of the faith: "It is important to differentiate between *theologia prima* and *theologia secunda*. *Theologia prima* is the personal, evocative expression of experiential faith, particularly as conveyed in the liturgy. It comes prior to intellectual inquiry and the systematization of truths into doctrinal propositions, which is *theologia secunda*. Liturgical language, the language of *theologia prima*, is typological, metaphorical, more redolent of Bible and prayer than of school and thesis, more patristic than scholastic, more impressionistic than systematic, more suggestive than probative. In a word, it is symbolic and evocative, not philosophical and ontological" (Taft, "Mass without the Consecration?," 212).

46. *GL* VI, 9.

47. *GL* VI, 11.

neighbour in a Christian sense only when he has experienced in the 'fear of God' something of the wholly-other measure of the love of the Lord God and then attempts to love his neighbour with all humility according to this unattainable measure."[48] Thus the Church—primarily in her worship—is portrayed as a kind of training ground in Balthasar's thought, where the process of deification begins and grows: "The Church is the place where the process of conforming humanity to the person and event of Christ is begun, the place where men dedicate themselves, in a faith that listens and obeys, to this event that is a person, are formed by him (sacramentally) and seek through their existence to make him effective in the world."[49]

The chief reason that the liturgy is "the font from which all [the Church's] power flows" is because it is where she receives Christ himself in the Eucharist.[50] Partaking of Holy Communion is the very drawing of divine life: "As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me" (John 6:57).[51] Thus the Eucharist, as God's continued incarnate presence, is the preeminent means of not only realizing deification, but comprehending what synergy means. For deification is ultimately a process of transformation from the inside out, about God working within, making a "home" in us (John 17). Thus, the goal of human existence—participating in the divine nature—begins even now in the Eucharist as we receive divine life itself by partaking of the body and blood of Christ. As the offertory of the Roman Rite attests, it is through "the mystery of this water and wine . . . [that] we come to share in the divinity of Christ."[52] It is therefore rightly called the "source and summit of the Christian life" in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*.[53] The Eucharist gifts the believer with the means to deification, as Balthasar explains: "By becoming contemporaneous with the believer in the sacrament, the Lord bestows upon him the possibility, given him in faith, of becoming like him

48. *GL* VI, 11.

49. *GL* VII, 445.

50. Paul VI, "Sacrosanctum Concilium" 10.

51. The New Testament exegete Raymond E. Brown places much weight on this text for conveying the reality of deification, stating: "In its brevity vs. 57 is a most forceful expression of the tremendous claim that Jesus gives *man a share in God's own life*, an expression far more real than the abstract formulation of 2 Pet 1:4" (Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 292).

52. This is the Ordinary Form of the rite. The words of the Extraordinary Form are: "By the Mystery signified in the mingling of this water and wine, grant us to have part in the Godhead of Him Who hath deigned to become a partaker of our humanity, Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord."

53. Paul VI, "Lumen Gentium" 11.

who became man. The grace he communicates is inseparable from his incarnation, his relationship to the Church, his historicity."[54]

Furthermore, this possibility of "becoming like him," granted through the Eucharist, is not simply or merely a "one way" gift of grace (as, for example, often conveyed via the "*pro nobis*" emphasis of classical Lutheran theology).[55] For given Christ's very nature as divine and human, it has an integrally reciprocal nature, since Christ is joined to humanity through the Incarnation. Therefore, Christ's sacrifice necessarily involves the sacrifice of the Church, his Body, as well:

> In so far as the new and eternal marriage between Godhead and manhood was sealed in blood on the Cross by the loving sacrifice of that one individual whose dual nature was itself the center and source of the Covenant, to that extent his *one* sacrifice to the Father contains, from the very start, a duality within itself: it is the sacrifice of the Head and of the Body, of the Bridegroom and of the Bride. This one marriage in blood contains within itself in advance not only every bodily approach of the Lord to his Church until the end of the world but also every response on the Church's part: the Church whom the Lord had already drawn into his liturgy of the Cross by the liturgical con-celebration of the Last Supper.[56]

This sacrifice of the Church is her highest act, her greatest synergy. It is this inherent and necessary reciprocity found particularly and most powerfully in the Eucharist that superlatively makes deification possible: inherent because when Christ offers himself up he offers his Body with him; necessary because deification is not possible without the already achieved union between God and man in Christ's very hypostatic being. Furthermore, this mutual sacrifice not only contains, but characterizes and defines "every response on the Church's part"[57]: the life of the Church is to be "eucharistic"—a life of kenotic self-giving in an attitude of thanksgiving.

The Eucharist epitomizes in many ways Balthasar's paradigm of "kenosis in *theosis*" in that it is where Christ's kenosis is completed and perfected, and where our *theosis* is preeminently accomplished. In the second volume

54. *TH*, 93.

55. This conception, in solely emphasizing God's gracious action in the Eucharist, rejects the sacrificial aspect of the Church's reciprocity, consequently often treating the very notion of synergy as problematic (if not offensive) for diminishing the unique efficacy of Christ's sacrifice.

56. *TH*, 94.

57. *TH*, 94.

of his *Theo-Drama*, he explains how the Eucharist signifies Christ's *ongoing* descent—a kenosis that continues beyond his passion on Holy Saturday:

> Since God, the Absolute, is essentially "above" and can only encounter his creature by freely bending down to the latter's level; and since, moreover, in this "inclination," absolute love cannot gain anything for itself but condescends freely and "for nothing," it follows that the "descent" is primary in the whole incarnational movement. . . . Nor can we say that this descent sets itself a relative limit, a point at which it changes into the ascending movement of body toward spirit. The descent goes from the act of incarnation right down to the "obedience unto death, death on a cross" (Phil 2:8), and continues downward in the "descent into hell" in solidarity with all those who are lost to time. It goes farther: from the obedience of the Cross to the atomizing of his bodily being, shared out in the Eucharist.[58]

The descent of the Incarnation continues in the Eucharist—Christ's kenosis has no limits. It is this descent and "atomization" which makes it possible for Christ to "fashion mankind as his 'body' by means of his Eucharist," and because they are now one, the body is deified, becoming "ecclesial, and even cosmic":

> The spirit's rootedness in the flesh implies that the latter is permeated by spirit and lifted up into the sphere of the spirit; accordingly, in the new supernatural rhythm in which God becomes incarnate right down to the lowest depths and out to the farthest bounds, the physical is "divinized," permeated with God's Pneuma, transfigured and "transferred" into the kingdom of the Son, and hence of God.[59]

What Balthasar describes as the "contrary rhythm" of natural anthropology—the body rising to spirit—therefore becomes a "new supernatural rhythm" in and through Christ, whose kenotic enfleshment is the catalyst for humanity's deification. It is a descending movement that occurs only through his radical kenosis, and furthermore can only be participated in via the creature's own kenosis. Indeed, Balthasar completes the discussion by emphasizing that humanity's untamed desire to "become God" in a false deification—the "Platonic Eros" which always seeks to abandon the body for the sake of the purely spiritual—"is overtaken in the event of Agape and brought to share in a fulfillment that goes far beyond its own upward thrust;

58. *TD* II, 411–12.
59. *TD* II, 411–12.

but this cannot take place unless it, too, is con-crucified together with the love of Christ."[60] Furthermore, deification is via the "path of the Eucharist" in Balthasar's thought because it is through the Eucharist that the Father "can integrate the Church and the world into his sacrificial spirit and so assimilate them to the mode of existence of the Trinity."[61]

Given Balthasar's emphasis on the preeminent role of the Eucharist, Nicholas Healy in *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* goes so far as to assert that "the key to resolving the thorny problem of the unity and difference of God and the world in deification lies in the eucharistic fulfillment of Christ's mission in the Spirit—a fulfilment which indicates not only a perfect simultaneity of unity and difference between God and the creature, but within that, the centrality of communion with the whole of creation as intrinsic to the core meaning of the *eschaton*."[62] Healy's assertion is helpful in focusing on the crucial reality of the deifying presence of Christ in the Eucharist and its communal context. However, it may be an overstatement to propose a single conceptual "key" in comprehending the depths of the mystery of deification, for, as Balthasar acknowledges, it is "an intimacy for which there is no analogy."[63] Only a diversity of expressions and analogies, each of which is imperfect yet essential, can begin to adequately honor its depth and mystery. (For example, the nuptial mystery of Christ and the Church, and the Spirit's indwelling of the believer are important ways of expressing humanity's union with God.) Only Christ *himself* in his hypostatic being can be considered the "key," surpassing analogy by being the concrete *analogia entis*—the living reality who himself brings us into union with God because he *is* God. Christ no doubt makes this possible preeminently in giving himself fully in the Eucharist, yet Balthasar's inner-trinitarian theology is equally important in conveying how unity and difference are realized in life in God: through the simultaneous intimacy and distance of the three Persons existing in kenotic love.

That being said, giving the Eucharist primacy of place in discussions of deification is crucial and fruitful, for by partaking of Christ's very being we already begin to share in his divine life. As St. John Chrysostom attests: "You take the Lord himself into you, you are joined with his holy body, you are intermingled with the body that is in heaven."[64] Therefore,

60. *TD* II, 412–13.

61. *TD* V, 484.

62. Healy, *Eschatology*, 162.

63. *TD* IV, 373. Even speaking of this greatest of mysteries as a "problem" that has a "key" to resolving it suggests an overly cataphatic approach and can imply too much about humanity's capacity for knowledge of the divine.

64. John Chrysostom, *On Colossians* 6.4 (*PG* 62:342).

given that the Eucharist represents the Church's highest synergy, David L. Schindler rightly emphasizes that it represents a "logic," a "pattern of intelligibility," providing the very form of Christian engagement with the world.[65] That logic is rooted in the divine-human reciprocal sacrifice, taking on an inherently kenotic form. As Balthasar insists, synergy involves becoming "eucharist" with Christ: "man's dying within the paradigm of Christ's death, his purification in the fire of Christ's love that is set forth on the Cross, [that] causes man's self-centered 'I' to explode and take on a eucharistic and trinitarian form."[66] The power to take on this divine form is Christ's kenotic love, granted first and foremost in the Eucharist, thus it is the paradoxical power of "impotence," of "self-giving," of "self-expropriation," as Balthasar conveys throughout his work.

Consequently, Balthasar characterizes "the very basis of the *communio sanctorum*" with expressions such as "eucharistic openness," and the "permeability" of persons.[67] Union with God is conceived within a relational, communal context in Balthasar's thought, specifically focused on receptivity and gifting oneself. It is about "making ourselves a dwelling place for others," being "'pure food' for one's neighbor according to the quantity of his merits or the purity of his mind."[68] It is our ontological incorporation into Christ's very Body, the Church—having our life in him, and his life in us—that is salvific.[69] Balthasar makes special note of the fact that Cyril of Alexandria describes the Eucharist as the means "devised by the Son's wisdom to unite and fuse us with God and with one another, although in our bodies and souls we are individual beings."[70] Relationality is thus a vital

65. Schindler, "Towards a Eucharistic Evangelization," 554, 563.

66. *TD* V, 484.

67. *TD* V, 383.

68. *TD* V, 382–83. The latter quote is from Origen, *Hom. in Lev.* 7.5. This eucharistic synergy is evident in Orthodox theology, for example in the writings of Archimandrite Vasileous, who speaks of "becoming eucharist": "For the word to be passed on and to give life, it has to be made flesh. When, along with your word, you give your flesh and blood to others, only then do your words mean something. Words without flesh . . . mean nothing. . . . Fortunate is the man who is broken in pieces and offered to others . . . he nourishes the other's very existence and makes it grow" (Vasileous, *Hymn of Entry,* 36).

69. As Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger asserts, "The Church [is] the locus of knowledge. Understanding can take place only within this 'we' constituted by participation in the origin. Indeed, all comprehension depends on participation" (Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission of Theology*, 55). This is a critical issue for ecumenical dialogue, for much Protestant theology fails to engage the most basic components of deification by denying the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the apostolicity of the Church, and the veneration of the saints.

70. *TL* III, 188. See Adam Cooper's illuminating discussion on the place of the

dimension of synergy: one must *know* Christ (trust him personally) and *belong* to his Body, the community of persons that comprises the Church, if one is to grow in faith and be initiated into the divine life.[71] We are saved in and through the Body of believers, so our destiny is not primarily about accomplishing something or reaching a destination, but more fundamentally *being with* God and others in loving communion.

The "open" and communal reality of deification conveyed by Balthasar involves a "deprivatization" of the individual in order to "make room" for not only others, but indeed the whole cosmos: "every human fate is deprivatized so that its personal range may extend to the whole universe, depending on how far it is prepared to cooperate in being inserted into the normative drama of Christ's life, death and Resurrection."[72] This insertion and extension occurs superlatively in the liturgy and Eucharist, where we are integrated into the cosmic and timeless dimensions of reality through communing with Christ, the saints, and the hosts of heaven.[73] More fully realizing this cosmic drama and being open to its implications facilitates one's transformation into a trinitarian person—the *imago trinitatis*—where "everything 'private' disappears in this process: man is dispossessed in favor of the divine life, and hence he is also taken over for God's salvific purposes for the world. . . . To the extent that a man becomes a person in Christ, he also develops ecclesial room for others."[74] The individual's dispossession opens him up to being available for God and others, allowing the creation of true community that reflects the perichoretic life of the Trinity.

It is through this *communio*—through the synergy of Christ's mystical body—that *all of creation* is granted the possibility of divinization. Balthasar affirms the patristic, catholic belief that it is Christ who is the ultimate

body in deification in St. Maximus's theology: "The person 'caught up' in the process of deification becomes in the ordered totality of his corporeal human nature—a composite unity of intellect (νοῦς), reason (λόγος), and sense (αἴσθησις), an agent of divine manifestation. And because God's deifying presence in his body is incarnate as love, it is sacramentally effective: capable of binding both himself and other human beings to God. In other words, the deified subject himself, as God by grace, becomes a means of deifying others" (Cooper, *Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified,* 47).

71. Throughout the gospel of John, for example, an essential issue for Jesus is whether or not others will "believe" in him, and it is clear that this belief goes far beyond the mere acceptance of his teachings. Believing always suggests coming to *know* him. "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father" (John 10:14–15).

72. *TD* II, 50.

73. Balthasar particularly focuses on Mary as the *typos* of the Church: "She is the peerless prototype of the Church and, as such, the Church's eschatological goal; thus Mary is the personal epitome of the Church of the New Testament" (*TD* III, 338–39).

74. *TD* III, 527.

mediator between creation and God, recapitulating the entire cosmos both through his very nature (*hypostasis*) as divine and human, and through his redemptive death and resurrection.[75] At the same time all of humanity participates in this cosmic work in and through him, a synergy stressed particularly by the Greek Fathers in their homilies on the book of Genesis. For example, Vladimir Lossky explains that "It was the divinely appointed function of the first man, according to St. Maximus, to unite in himself the whole of created being; and at the same time to reach his perfect union with God and thus grant the state of deification to the whole creation."[76] Balthasar upholds this conviction in his assertion that "the cosmos perfects itself in man, who at the same time sums up the world and surpasses it."[77] He underscores that because the incarnate Son is the "authentic, primal archetype or idea of every human being," the mission of each and every human being is integrally connected to his:

> It is from this center that human conscious subjects are allotted personalizing roles or missions (charisms). . . . Since [Christ's] role/person is central, those who have been personalized by the roles they have been given will also share in his function of revealing God. . . . In this way the divine life, which is manifested to the world through the humanity of the Son, is also imparted to this world, in the community of believers called the "Body of Christ," to be lived and shared by it.[78]

As Balthasar highlights here, it is in and through humanity's communal synergy in the Church that the deification of creation is realized.

Because the divine life is granted through Christ and his Body, the Church, Balthasar affirms (following St. Paul in Col 1:15–20) that the final

75. This central tenet of the faith is attested to in scripture (particularly Eph 1) and throughout the patristic tradition, especially the writings of St. Irenaeus (e.g., Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* V.21.1).

76. Lossky, *Mystical Theology,* 109. Leonid Ouspensky affirms this fundamental conviction in stating that "It is in man and through man that the participation of all creatures in the divine eternal life is actualized and made manifest" (Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 187).

77. Balthasar, *My Work*, 114.

78. *TD* III, 258–59. Commenting on the integral relationship between the world and humanity, it is worthwhile noting that Balthasar rejects Thomas Aquinas's assertion that "it is only humans and the mineral world that enter the resurrection world, while the world of plants and animals simply falls into oblivion," referring to this as a "cruel verdict" (*TD* V, 420). Balthasar argues that this "contradicts the Old Testament sense of the solidarity between the living, subhuman cosmos and the world of men" as well as a "deep Christian sense" (*TD* V, 421).

form of the earth "will bear a christological stamp."[79] Since the very name of "Christ" is tied to his "making peace by the blood of the cross" (vs. 20), one can affirm that this stamp bears the nature and hence beauty of kenotic love. Balthasar asserts (with von Speyr) that "every act of obedience that distinguished the Son during his mission is now translated by the Father into that eternal form of subjection that will now enfold all the world's beings."[80] Thus, in Balthasar's theology, Christ's kenotic obedience will characterize the *theosis* of not only humanity, but the entire cosmos.

Ultimately, however, Balthasar's vision of the divinization of the world goes beyond simply emphasizing Christ's kenosis to realizing its purpose and celebrating its fruits. For kenosis must always be understood within the context of love: giving oneself for the sake of the other is the means to relational openness. Hence, in Balthasar's thought humanity's kenotic synergy is only truly expressed and made full in a liturgical way—with all of creation gifting itself to others and God in a spirit of praise. He fully resonates with the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius and St. Maximus in seeing the world, and existence itself "as liturgical event, as adoration, as celebratory service, as hidden but holy dance."[81] He describes their vision as

> a holy universe, flowing forth, wave upon wave, from the unfathomable depths of God, whose center lies always beyond the creature's reach . . . of a world dancing in festal celebration of liturgical adoration, a single organism made up of inviolable ranks of heavenly spirits and ecclesial offices, all circling round the brilliant darkness of the central mystery.[82]

This is the vision of a holy, cosmic synergy that can only be comprehended and experienced in the community of faith—in the liturgy that joins humanity together with the "ranks of heavenly spirits" to worship God.[83] In the present this can only be experienced proleptically, yet this foretaste in worship begins to reveal the fullness of this reality—one characterized by self-giving love: "However we try to portray the unimaginable eternal life in the communion of saints, one element of it is constant: we shall be

79. *TD* V, 422.

80. *TD* V, 521.

81. *CL*, 60. Cf. Balthasar, "Wendung nach Osten," 38–43, where he discusses the sacramental/liturgical vision of the cosmos expressed in the Church Fathers and Byzantine theology.

82. *CL*, 58.

83. Romano Guardini describes this reality as follows: "Thus the liturgy embraces everything in existence, angels, men and things; all the content and events of life; in short, the whole of reality. And natural reality is here made subject to supernatural; created reality related to the uncreated" (Guardini, *Church and the Catholic,* 29–30).

filled with astonished joy, constantly being given new and unexpected gifts through the creative freedom of others; and we for our part shall delight to invent other, new gifts and bestow them in return."[84]

84. *TD* V, 404. The Orthodox theologian Kallistos Ware expresses a similar vision: "When the Cappadocian Fathers in the fourth century are describing God, one of their key words is *koinonia*, meaning fellowship, communion, or relationship. As St. Basil says in his work on the Holy Spirit, 'The union of the Godhead lies in the *koinonia*, the interrelationship, of the Persons.' So this then is what the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is saying: God is shared love, not self-love. God is openness, exchange, solidarity, self-giving. . . . The same is true of the human person when living in a Trinitarian mode according to the divine image" (Ware, "I Love Therefore I Am").

13

Conclusion

There is a living stream murmuring within me and saying
"Upward and onward to the Father."[1]
—IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

We began our exploration of Balthasar's theology of deification by noting his ambivalence and even apparent negativity toward the theme. Therefore, it is striking to eventually realize that it permeates his entire body of work, guiding its very purpose and encapsulating its goal. Setting the "titanisms" of false deification aside, Christian *theosis*, characterized by kenotic love, defines the very meaning of "salvation" in Balthasar's theology. Union with God—which begins in this life but is only eschatologically consummated—is realized through the gift of God himself, in the Word made flesh, who reveals and embodies the mystery of the fullness of the Trinity. Given this Christological core of Balthasar's theology, *theosis* is inseparable from kenosis, which is its very character and *modus operandi*. For kenosis is both the "way" of Christ *and* the perichoretic life of the Trinity and is thus an archetypal principle for the entire cosmos: all that exists, including humanity itself, is an *analogia trinitatis*, conveying the self-expropriation of the three Persons in and for the sake of love.

1. Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans* 7.2, quoted in *TL* III, 433.

Christological Theosis

Our investigation of Balthasar's conception of *theosis* began with his insistence on a first, fundamental kenotic stance necessary to abolish false notions of deification, which are rooted in the Promethean desire to surpass creatureliness for the sake of realizing a higher "spiritual" existence. He contends that the Christian approach to realizing "likeness" to God demands humility: an unabashed affirmation of the impassable "cleft" between humanity and God, i.e., that we can never *be* God. However, the chief reason all Christian notions of deification require a kenotic core according to Balthasar is rooted in God's self-revelation itself—in the self-emptying of Christ Jesus. Christ's indefatigable "downward movement" which characterizes his life and mission reveals God's very way of being, thus necessarily defining the path of humanity's "becoming God." As Balthasar asserts, "without the Cross and the Blood of the Cross, and without the permanent wounds in the risen Lord, we would never have guessed the depth of the mystery of the Trinity."[2] Humanity is destined for communion with God, and Jesus' redemptive acts of the Paschal mystery gift us with a vision of what God is like—who this God is whom we will dwell with for eternity. In the face of Christ, on the cross, in death, as the Risen One, we see the face of God. Thus, in a real way we prepare ourselves for "partaking in the divine nature" by contemplating Christ's kenosis.

Consequently, Balthasar's conception of deification is rooted in the "law of distance and of 'being a servant'" which should never be sought to be "overcome and abolished" as in Gnostic conceptions of "ascent."[3] Humanity (and indeed all of creation) is not deified through somehow being "spiritualized" via shedding its materiality, as in the Platonic schema. Rather, "becoming God" paradoxically means *embracing* creatureliness as God himself did in Christ: "Salvation is not from finitude; rather is it the taking up of the finite (and so of the other) into the infinite."[4] This "taking up" of the creaturely into divinity is only possible because the eternally begotten Logos "took up" human flesh, as Balthasar continually affirms.[5]

2. *TD* V, 478.

3. *FSO,* 360.

4. Nichols, *Say It Is Pentecost*, 201.

5. In this emphasis, Balthasar affirms the basic thrust of the incarnational theology of John of Damascus, who in defending the use of icons in the iconoclastic controversy in the eighth and ninth centuries said: "I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter, who became matter for my sake, who willed to take his abode in matter, who worked out my salvation through matter" (John of Damascus, *Divine Images*, "First Apology" 16).

It is Christ's very person—in the hypostasis of his divine and human natures—that is the vehicle for humanity's deification, a theological truth well attested in the writings of the Church Fathers and affirmed in Balthasar's theology. He describes Christ as the "concrete *analogia entis*" who envelops and overcomes the unassailable divide between the created and uncreated through being both the Son of Man and the Son of God. More specifically, it is because Christ's hypostatic union is "expressly consummated in the absolute 'unmixedness' of the two natures, indeed precisely in their greatest separation" that the gulf between humanity and divinity can be bridged.[6] In other words, union with God is not about *surpassing* the infinite distance between created and uncreated reality, since Christ's two natures remain distinct within the unity of his person. On the contrary, Balthasar stresses that union is achieved *in and through* this gulf: "the eternity of the cleft is at the same time the eternity of the juxtaposition that allows love to happen at all."[7] Thus, paradoxically, distance is overcome by *not* being overcome—by maintaining the distinction of non-identity that is necessary for true personhood and community to be realized. It is the "relation of radical difference" in Christ himself that is the very means of union.[8] The overcoming of the insuperable distance between the natural and supernatural to create unity, while maintaining creaturely identity in the presence of transcendence—the chief conundrum of the metaphysical issue in the theology of deification—has already been achieved in Christ hypostatically. Therefore, incorporation into his very Body via baptism and the Eucharist (which presumes full inclusion in the community of the *mystici corporis*) inserts humanity into that established reality. Balthasar emphasizes that it is particularly his glorified human nature "with its senses transfigured and glorified" that is the "medium through which the mystical body makes contact with God."[9]

Nonetheless—and here a critical element of Balthasar's contribution to the theology of divinization comes to the fore—Christ's role as the "Second Adam," drawing humanity to life in God, is not accomplished simply via the Incarnation. For it is not Christ's hypostasis alone which creates the bond between the finite and infinite (otherwise his passion would be superfluous), but equally his loving kenosis: "the obedience of the Son of God represents the concrete universal idea of the relationship between heaven and earth in the form of crucified love."[10] Balthasar emphasizes that Christ's role of cos-

6. *FSO*, 357.
7. *FSO*, 355.
8. *FSO*, 356.
9. Balthasar, *Prayer*, 218.
10. *TD* II, 271.

mic unifier is only made complete when his kenosis reaches its utmost depth in his going to the dead—the place where the fullness of God's kenotic love is revealed, and complete solidarity with humanity is realized in the divine *unterfassung*. It is Christ's movement of descent that epitomizes the fullness of meaning and character of *theosis* in Balthasar's theology. He explains that the deepest aim of Christ's kenosis—"the total self-expropriation of the love of God"—is to "give man the gift of the same love."[11] In other words, it is for the purpose of love that Christ grants the gift of deification—so that love will last, that it can be shared and enjoyed for eternity.

This kenotic emphasis of Balthasar's Christology highlights another unique aspect of his theology of divinization: the fact that he is not simply interested in exploring the issue of how divinization is possible—i.e., how union between the finite and infinite, material and spiritual, can be achieved—but more so what it *means*, the process through which it occurs. His approach to this issue is less about universal, objective principles than about the existential, personal, and relational aspects of divine truth. For example, in his well-known work, *Prayer*, Balthasar explains more fully why union with God is not about removing oneself from the world, rejecting its physicality to seek the naked truth non-conceptually, as in Gnostic approaches to deification: "God's 'self-emptying,' his 'becoming poor,' is a direct image of his fullness and richness and the prodigality of his love; the spiritual is made known through its covering, and is brought close to us through its sensible expression."[12] For Balthasar the clearest language of God's love is "the language of the flesh in its humble condition . . . in the humiliation of the Incarnate Word."[13] This emphasis not only keeps deification within its proper creaturely (non-Gnostic) context, but speaks most intimately and powerfully to the depths of the human person.

Trinitarian Theosis

While Christ's very person—in his incarnation, passion, and resurrection—reveals the kenotic nature of God and incorporates creation into divine life, it is the Trinity that brings to fruition the fullness of the meaning of *theosis* in Balthasar's theology. For deification is by definition life in God—a trinitarian reality. Christ initiates and makes possible both the process and its glorious end, yet it is the community of the divine Persons who eternally deify the cosmos by embracing and transforming it into the paradigm of

11. *GL* VII, 402.
12. Balthasar, *Prayer,* 213.
13. Balthasar, *Prayer,* 212.

all reality: the *imago trinitatis*. Furthermore, Christ's salvific mission is not accomplished solo, but is one with the Father and Spirit, thus only understandable and possible in and through them. For Balthasar, it is the Father's *Urkenosis* that in begetting the "other" brought love, community, and the very potential of creation's divinization into actuality by embracing all "distances" via his relationship with the Son. And it is the Spirit who is Himself the *donum*, the "gift that contains the whole being of the Godhead"[14] and the "*vinculum amoris* between Father and Son"[15] in the extremity of Christ's kenosis in Sheol. Given these conceptions of trinitarian life, it is not surprising that Balthasar describes the Trinity in such a kenotic way, making such assertions as "the identity of the divine essence is found in the positive self-expropriation of the Divine Persons,"[16] and that God "cannot be God in any other way but in this 'kenosis' within the Godhead itself."[17] (With such an intense focus on trinitarian kenosis, and in making such definitive pronouncements of this kind about the very nature of God, it must be noted that Balthasar pushes the limits of suitable theological expression. Only time will tell whether or not in the judgement of the Church his theology in this area will be deemed orthodox.)[18]

In Balthasar's theology it is the nature of God as Trinity dwelling in kenotic relationship, nurturing "unity in difference," that provides the fundamental basis for comprehending how the non-divine can be miraculously drawn into the sphere of the divine. Because he envisions inner-trinitarian life as the "generative self-expropriation of the Father to the Son and of both to the Holy Spirit," it is kenotic love that is not only the source of intimacy, but explains how "room" is made for difference.[19] Perichoretic love nurtures and celebrates "otherness" within the community of unity. It is for this reason Balthasar asserts that "only a trinitarian God can guarantee that man will not forfeit his independent being when united with God."[20]

Balthasar particularly highlights Christ's kenosis on Holy Saturday as a trinitarian event that makes humanity's union with God possible by not only revealing the "abysmal vastness" between the three Persons but incorporating humanity's "otherness" into the life of the Trinity. According to Balthasar, the death of the Son discloses the nature of the inner-trinitarian

14. *TL* III, 161.
15. Oakes, "Internal Logic," 191.
16. *TL* II, 178.
17. *TD* IV, 325.
18. See also 69n22 140n26.
19. *TL* II, 284.
20. *TD* V, 108.

relations as embracing both unfathomable distance and an equally "inconceivable nearness," opening up a new relational way of conceiving the mystery of *theosis*.[21] Primarily, it is because "the sinner's alienation from God was taken into the Godhead, into the 'economic' distance between the Father and Son" that "room" is made for humanity in the perichoretic life of the Trinity.[22] It is Balthasar's conception of this unfathomable distance which paradoxically creates greater intimacy between the Persons, and "space" for inclusion of humanity's difference, that he believes gives "sharpness" to his theology of deification as compared with that of the Church Fathers. Thus in Balthasar's model of *theosis*, kenosis is at the heart of creating and maintaining both unity and difference in God, for union in the Trinity is brought to its fullness via the distance wrought through Christ's kenosis, and likewise distance ("otherness") is guaranteed via the perichoresis of self-expropriating love. Affirming the thought of Maximus the Confessor, Balthasar surmises that "The highest union with God is not realized 'in spite of' our lasting difference from him, but rather 'in' and 'through' it. Unity is not the abolition of God's *distance* from us, and so of his incomprehensibility; it is its highest revelation."[23]

Consequently, if Balthasar's theology has any verity (and it clearly has some, given its foundation in the teaching of the Church Fathers), it is of logical necessity that this kenotic, relational mode of life in God must be conveyed and instilled throughout the deification process, for this divine life is the very substance and goal of humanity's transfiguration. This means that there is an inherent synergy between God and humanity—a reciprocal engagement created and nurtured by God's grace, yet only fulfilled via human responsiveness. For God will not deify us without our participation, given that he created us specifically in his image—with the dignity of freedom and choice that not only defines us, but brings us into "likeness" with him. That being said, Balthasar consistently emphasizes that humanity's greatest "work" in this synergy with God consists mostly in simple humility and receptivity to grace, for "becoming God" is chiefly (and paradoxically) about becoming more creaturely, more human—in other words, more like Mary, the *Theotokos*, and Christ, through whom we are deified.[24]

21. Balthasar, *Grain of Wheat*, 72.

22. *TD* IV, 381.

23. *CL*, 96.

24. See Maximos Constas's article on the Mother of God's kenosis as depicted in Byzantine iconography. He describes how the artists show us a world in which "the kenotic form of God is also the form that the Mother of God has chosen for her own life, an expression of her innermost being as surrendered and poured out to God" (Constas, "Kenosis of Christ").

It is through living in the community of faith, and particularly in worship, that we reflect this fullness of human being, as *homo adorans*. For we are invited into divine life by being incorporated into Christ's mystical Body, his Church, which is a reciprocal process that occurs chiefly via the sacraments. The Eucharist pre-eminently deifies us by feeding us with Christ's very being: through partaking of his "atomization" in his body and blood, Christ's "unmixed" hypostatic union of his divine and human natures becomes part of us, making it possible to enter into God's very life. Balthasar emphasizes that this "marriage in blood" is the apex of humanity's participation in the divinization process for it contains "every response on the Church's part."[25] This synergy of sacrifice, characterized by a mutual divine-human kenosis, and shared with the entire community of saints and hosts of heaven, represents the fullest form of perichoresis possible in earthly existence and hence the manifestation of *theosis* in progress.

Beyond Traditional Models

Balthasar's highly personal, relational, and kenotic *way* of exploring and expressing the theology of *theosis*—as much as its content—is therefore in itself a significant contribution to the theme. For in focusing on Christ's *mode* of incorporating humanity into his Person through his incarnation and passion, and the inner-trinitarian *way of being* as perichoretic self-expropriation, Balthasar shifts the discussion of divinization away from objective and universal abstractions (such as "vision" and "essence") towards the more subjective, dynamic, and existential categories of relationship. Union between humanity and God is conceived and conveyed through the language of "freedom," "openness," and "otherness," within the context of God's life as a *communio personarum*. This approach is a fitting expansion of traditional modes of discourse given the inherent relational reality of *theosis*, and allows new avenues of understanding to open up through illuminating insights vis-à-vis personhood and community.

Through this methodology, we discovered that Balthasar does not envision final union with God within the framework of the intellect—as a state of static bliss, in *contemplatio*—as he at times characterized the scholastic approach. Nor is union obviated by the unknown "abyss" of God's essence, a "fourth thing" that precludes God's self-revelation and hence true union with humanity, which he considers the chief flaw in the Byzantine distinction between God's essence and energies. (Nevertheless, Balthasar's model seems closer to the Byzantine than the scholastic in focusing on the

25. *TH*, 94.

existential aspects of *theosis* rather than primarily its eschatological reality: there is a palpable immediacy and earthiness that characterizes his thought on the subject.) Rather, union with God is described via reflecting on the nature of personal, relational mystery, which inherently affirms the distinction of persons while likewise allowing for intimacy. This approach helps to illumine the reality that God is both revealed and hidden, both present and seemingly absent, for, as Balthasar asserts, love itself seeks expression, yet also demands "veiling," for it "wants to remain a mystery to itself."[26] Furthermore, he asserts that love, as the "worshipful core of all things . . . turns its gaze away from itself," once again highlighting the other-centered, kenotic character of all authentic personal communion.[27] Thus, throughout his treatment of the theme, *theosis* has more to do with embracing and revering the mystery of God and others (a mystery that will remain, and even intensify, for eternity) than "knowing" in the sense of intellectual enlightenment. For it is *particularly* in his hiddenness that we come to know God: "in the ultimate concealment on the Cross, when he abandons the Son, he is most revealed in his love for the world."[28] In this emphasis, Balthasar continually affirms the apophatic nature of divinization "to the extent the creature comes nearer to God and becomes more 'similar' to him, the dissimilarity must always appear as the more basic, as the 'first truth.' . . . Or, as all the authentic mystics express it: The more we know God, the less we know him."[29]

Balthasar's personalist model thus contributes to the theology of deification in redefining how "difference" is conceived, and hence maintained, within the union between God and creation. This model is by no means perfect, for it can at times come across as uncomfortably too psychological and hence anthropomorphic, nevertheless it is a valuable addition to traditional modes of discussion given that *theosis* is first and foremost an existential issue: personal salvation is realized solely through relationship with God in Christ. We are deified in, through and for loving relationship, hence relational logic and constructs could even be said to be *more* "substantive" regarding ontological being than "substance."[30] This leads to the

26. *TL* I, 209, 213.

27. *TL* I, 213.

28. *TD* V, 496. It is through Christ's wounds that "the mystery is exposed."

29. *FSO*, 354–55.

30. In this approach, Balthasar's theology of *theosis* resonates with a key characteristic of Byzantine thought. As John Meyendorff asserts, "The central theme, or intuition, of Byzantine theology is that man's nature is not a static, 'closed,' autonomous entity, but a dynamic reality, determined in its very existence by its relationship to God. This relationship is seen as a process of ascent and as communion—man, created in the image of God, is called to achieve freely a 'divine similitude'; his relationship to God is both

implication that *all* theological disciplines—which are not only effected by, but ultimately subsumed under the theme of *theosis*—are inherently rooted in synergy (or *praxis*) or they are not true theology, for our responsiveness to God's loving approach vitally matters. Prayer is humanity's first and most basic response: as Evagrius Ponticus rightly insists, "If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you will be a theologian."[31] Or as Balthasar puts it, one must approach divine truths "on one's knees," praying theology (*betende Theologie*).[32]

Regarding the multi-layered, more apophatic means inherent in expressing divine truth via relational categories which some may object to (especially those with more scholastic inclinations), Balthasar's offering of various inter-reliant "resolutions" to the classic unity/difference conundrum of the theology of deification need not be considered problematic, but can in fact be viewed as appropriate and helpful. For they reflect the reality of God's infinite *ekstasis*—that for eternity He will be pouring Himself out for us, revealing new facets of His truth, goodness, and beauty. For Balthasar, Christ's hypostasis, his extreme kenosis in Sheol, the Father's *Urkenosis*, the perichoretic nature of the Trinity, the Eucharist are *all* means by which God opens up his very life the to the world, overcoming difference and distance that "all may be made perfect in one" (John 17:23). Balthasar is on the right track in emphasizing that this metaphysical issue necessarily has multifold "answers" involving Christology and trinitarian theology, each of which is incomplete in and of itself. For together these various "sketches" begin to fill out the portrait of deification in its infinite depth. This wealth of perspectives is also fitting in that it reflects the very nature of the Trinity which permeates all being: unity in multiplicity, coherence in diversity.

Theosis and Plerosis

Balthasar's greatest contribution to the theology of deification may be his illumination of the fullness of the nature of love itself. He broadens (or one could even say *inverts*) common interpretations of what "kenosis" means in Philippians 2: it is not a "self-emptying" in the sense of the Son *losing*

---

a givenness and a task, an immediate experience and an expectation of even greater vision to be accomplished in a free effort of love" (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology,* 2). Nevertheless, Balthasar's strong emphasis on "descent" rather than "ascent" is a unique focus that often differentiates his thought from Byzantine theology.

31. Evagrius Ponticus, *Treatise on Prayer*, 61, quoted in Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 192.

32. *WR*, 9.

something; it is rather the very manifestation of divinity. As Balthasar affirms, "it is clear that only the highest divine power [is] capable of such a form of loving self-surrender."[33] He therefore helps to reveal the truth that weakness does not so much conceal power, as reveal the form of true, divine power which is love. As a result, kenosis must ultimately be spiritually understood as *plerosis* (πλήρωσις)—*fullness*—for the Son, who "let himself be robbed over everything in utter obedience," is "the most exact expression of the absolute fullness, which does not consist of 'having,' but of 'being = giving.'"[34] In other words, Balthasar's thought inexorably conveys that kenosis is not only the *path* that brings us to the greatest fullness of being, but is *itself* that fullness of being. Deified being is inherently kenotic being.

Even though Balthasar's theology of *theosis* is defined by kenosis, it is not ultimately distinguished by an emphasis on suffering and death, but rather leads one to consider the path to fullness of life in God. This reality is beautifully illustrated in the classic "Icon of the Resurrection of Christ," which portrays Christ's descent to the dead to save the lost. In the icon, Christ has demolished the gates of Sheol, and is reaching down to Adam and Eve to lift them up from the confining darkness of death toward the expansive light of eternity.[35] There is perhaps no more striking image that expresses the vital unity between kenosis and *theosis*, for the transfigured Christ appears with a face of compassion, reaching down with divine help, taking hold of Adam and Eve by their wrists, which conveys both their utter helplessness and his determination to save. The message is abundantly clear: the glory of Christ is his self-emptying love—his sacrificial willingness to take upon himself both sin and death in order to raise humanity to new life. In many ways the icon is therefore an icon of *theosis*, for it depicts what being in the "image and likeness" of God means, the sheer giftedness of grace, and the hope of glory in communion with God.

This glory is described in Balthasar's theology of deification as being "taken up into the entirely different, liberating 'servitude' of eternal freedom by the grace (*dedit dona*) of the God who first descends to the level of the creature."[36] Eternal freedom is "reciprocal openness," availability, the element

33. *TL* II, 284.

34. *GL* VII, 391.

35. This image is what Christian tradition considers the essential form of "The Icon of the Resurrection." Many artistic depictions of the resurrection show the glorified Christ standing majestically outside of the tomb alone, often with arms upraised and his eyes looking up to heaven, which conveys a significantly different attitude and meaning.

36. *TD* IV, 382.

of surprise, and creativity which "will always be the offspring of personal."[37] It thrives through the "interplay between presence and distance"; intimacy of union with God within an ever growing awareness of the infinite mystery of the Holy One.[38] When in the final paragraph of his multi-volume *Theo-Drama* Balthasar highlights the gifts given to humanity by God and then counterpoises the hypothetical question, "What does God gain from the world?"[39] his answer exemplifies his entire theology of deification: "the world is able to take the divine things it has received from God, together with the gift of being created, and return them to God as a divine gift."[40] Eternal life in God is not simply about contemplating his glory, rather God desires a reciprocal relationship of mutual self-giving with all that He has created. *Theosis* is a sharing of the grace revealed and granted preeminently in Christ, God's perfect gift. It is through immersion in God's perichoresis that fullness of being and joy are realized, a life Balthasar describes as one of "constant vitality," not a "state of rest," for there is not only an "unceasing becoming" in God himself, who continues to create anew, but also of human persons, who "are to 'become' what God 'is.'"[41]

37. See *TD* V, 485–87.
38. *FSO*, 355.
39. *TD* V, 521.
40. *TD* V, 521.
41. *TD* V, 511–12. The latter quote cites von Speyr, *Objektive Mystik,* 105.

Bibliography

Albus, Michael. "Spirit and Fire: An Interview with Hans Urs von Balthasar." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 32 (2005) 573–93.

Alfeyev, Hilarion. *Christ the Conqueror of Hell: The Descent into Hades from an Orthodox Perspective*. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's, 2009.

Anderson, Cynthia Peters. "Reclaiming God's Vision for Human Life: Participation in the Life of God in the Thought of Cyril of Alexandria, Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar." PhD diss., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2011.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. 5 vols. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1948.

———. *The Three Greatest Prayers: Commentaries in the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Apostles' Creed*. Translated by Laurence Shapcote. London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1937.

Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by Garry Wills. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. 13 vols. Translated by G. T. Thomson, et al. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936–77.

Benedict XVI. *God Is Love—Deus Caritas Est: Encyclical Letter*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006.

———. *Holy Men and Women of the Middle Ages and Beyond*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012.

———. "Lenten Meeting with the Clergy of Rome." Address. February 22, 2007. Online. http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070222_clergy-rome.html.

Bolshakoff, Sergius. *Russian Mystics*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1977.

The Book of Concord. Translated by Theodore Tappert. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959.

Braaten, Carl E. *Principles of Lutheran Theology*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007.

Braaten, Carl E., and Robert W. Jenson, eds. *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

Bromiley, Geoffrey W., ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

Brown, Raymond E. *The Gospel According to John, I–XII*. The Anchor Bible 29. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966.

Bulgakov, Sergius. *The Bride of the Lamb*. Translated by Boris Jakim. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Burrows, Ruth. *Essence of Prayer*. Mahwah, NJ: Hiddenspring, 2006.

Carabine, Deirdre. "The Fathers: The Church's Intimate, Youthful Diary." In *The Beauty of Christ*, edited by Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris, 73–91. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994.

Casiday, Augustine M. *Evagrius Ponticus*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. London: Chapman, 1994.

Catherine of Siena. *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*. Translated by Suzanne Noffke. Classics of Western Spirituality. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1980.

Catholic University of America, ed. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967.

Chariton of Valamo, Igumen. *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*. Edited by Timothy Ware. Translated by E. Kadloubovsky and E. M. Palmer. New York: Faber and Faber, 1997.

Christensen, Michael J., and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds. *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

Clarke, W. Norris. *Person and Being*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2004.

———. *The Philosophical Approach to God*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

Clément, Olivier. *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Text and Commentary*. New York: New City, 1995.

Coakley, Sarah. "Does Kenosis Rest on a Mistake? Three Kenotic Models in Patristic Exegesis." In *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, edited by C. Stephen Evans, 246–64. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Congar, Yves. *Dialogue Between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism*. Translated by Philip Loretz. Westminster, MD: Newman, 1966.

Constas, Maximos. "The Kenosis of Christ and the Mother of God in Byzantine Iconography." Paper presented at Higgins Hall, Boston College, April 21, 2015. Online. https://www.academia.edu/12068924/The_Kenosis_of_Christ_and_the_Mother_of_God_in_Byzantine_Iconography_Boston_College_April_2015_.

Cooper, Adam G. *The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Daily Roman Missal. Edited by James Socías. Chicago: Midwest Theological Forum, 2004.

Daley, Brian E. "Balthasar's Reading of the Church Fathers." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, edited by Edward T. Oakes and David Moss, 187–206. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

———, ed. *Gregory of Nazianzus*. Early Church Fathers. London: Routledge, 2006.

De Lubac, Henri. *The Christian Faith*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986.

———. *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*. Translated by James R. Dunne. New York: Ecclesia, 1969.

———. *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*. Translated by Edith M. Riley. New York: World, 1963.

———. *The Mystery of the Supernatural*. Translated by Rosemary Sheed. New York: Herder and Herder, 1967.

———. *Paradoxes of Faith*. Translated by Paule Simon and Sadie Kreilkamp. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987.

Denzinger-Schönmetzer. *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*. 43rd ed. Edited by Peter Hünermann. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012.

Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément. Edited by Louis Pirot. Paris: Libraire Letouzey et Ané, 1957.

Dictionnaire de Spiritualité. Vol. 3. Edited by Marcel Viller. Paris: Beauchesne, 1957.

Dulles, Avery. *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Edited by John Anthony McGuckin. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Fee, Gordon D. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Finch, Jeffrey D. "Neo-Palamism, Divinizing Grace, and the Breach between East and West." In *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, edited by Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, 233–49. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

Finlan, Stephen, and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds. *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*. 2 vols. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006, 2011.

Fitzmeyr, Joseph A. *Romans*. The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1993.

Flannery, Austin, ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2014.

Florensky, Pavel. *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters.* Translated by Boris Jakim. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Florovsky, Georges. "St. Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers." In vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky,* edited by Richard S. Haugh, 105–120. Vaduz, Europa: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987.

Frede-Wenger, Britta. "'Good' Friday after Auschwitz?" In *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust*, edited by David Patterson and John K. Roth, 137–49. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005.

Gavrilyuk, Paul L. "The Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58.3 (2005) 251–69.

———. "The Retrieval of Deification: How a Once-Despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum." *Modern Theology* 25.4 (2009) 647–59.

Gawronski, Raymond. *Word and Silence: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.

Archimandrite George. *Theosis*: *The True Purpose of Human Life*. 4th ed. Mt. Athos: Holy Monastery of St. Gregorios, 2006.

Gorman, Michael J. *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

Gregory of Nazianzus. *Festal Orations*: *St. Gregory of Nazianzus*. Edited by John Behr. Translated by Nonna Verna Harrison. Popular Patristic Series. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2008.

———. *On God and Christ*: *The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius.* Translated by Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham. Popular Patristic Series 23. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2002.

Gregory of Nyssa. "Address on Religious Instruction." In *Christology of the Later Fathers*, edited by E. R. Hardy, 268–326. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954.

Grillmeier, Aloys. *Christ in Christian Tradition*. Translated by J. S. Bowden. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1964.

Guardini, Romano. *The Church and the Catholic and the Spirit of the Liturgy*. Translated by Ada Lane. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935.

Hallonsten, Gösta. "*Theosis* in Recent Research: A Renewal of Interest and a Need for Clarity." In *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, edited by Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, 281–93. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

Healy, Nicholas J. *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Henry, P. "Kénose." In vol. 5 of *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément*, edited by Louis Pirot, 7–161. Paris: Libraire Letouzey et Ané, 1957.

Howsare, Rodney. *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: T. & T. Clark, 2009.

Hugo, Victor. *Les Miserables*. Translated by Norman Denny. London: Penguin, 1982.

Hunter, Milton R. *The Gospel Through the Ages*. Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1945.

Ide, Pascal. "L'analogie selon Balthasar. Une relecture à partir de l'amour de don." *Science et Esprit* 66.1 (2014) 85–108.

Ignatius IV, Patriarch of Antioch. "A Theology of Creation." *Sourozh: A Journal of Orthodox Life and Thought* 38 (1989) 1–15.

John Chrysostom. *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*. Translated by Paul W. Harkins. Fathers of the Church. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984.

John of Damascus. *On the Divine Images*. Translated by David Anderson. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1980.

———. *Writings*. Translated by Frederic H. Chase Jr. Fathers of the Church. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958.

John Paul II. "Fides et Ratio." Encyclical, September 14, 1998. Online. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html.

———. "Redemptor Hominis." Encyclical, March 4, 1979. Online. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. "The Right Way to Speak about God? Pannenberg on Analogy." *Theological Studies* 43.4 (1982) 673–92.

Johnson, Junius. *Christ and Analogy: The Christocentric Metaphysics of Hans Urs von Balthasar*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013.

Johnson, Keith L. *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*. New York: T. & T. Clark, 2010.

Kadloubovsky, E., and G. E. H. Palmer, eds. *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*. London: Faber and Faber, 1954.

Kannengiesser, Charles. "Listening to the Fathers." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 16.3 (1989) 413–18.

Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. "The Ecumenical Potential of the Eastern Doctrine of Theosis: Emerging convergences in Lutheran and Free Church Soteriologies." *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review* 23.2 (2002) 45–77.

Keating, Daniel A. *Deification and Grace*. Naples, FL: Sapientia, 2007.

Keegan, Paul, ed. *The New Penguin Book of English Verse*. London: Penguin, 2004.

Kehl, Medard, and Werner Löser, eds. *The von Balthasar Reader*. Translated by Robert J. Daly and Fred Lawrence. New York: Crossroad, 1982.

Kittel, Gerhard, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 3. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965.

Komonchak, J. A. et al., eds. *The New Dictionary of Theology.* Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987.

Larchet, Jean-Claude. *La divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur*. Cogitatio fidei, 194. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996.

Leamy, Katy. *The Holy Trinity: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and His Sources*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015.

Lefsrud, Sigurd. "From Dialectic to Dialogic: Beyond Luther's Theology of the Cross to Balthasar's Theology of Holy Saturday." *Louvain Studies* 36.1 (2012) 76–99.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

The Liturgy of the Hours: According to the Roman Rite. New York: Catholic Book, 1975.

Long, D. Stephen. "From the Hidden God to the Glory of God: Barth, Balthasar, and Nominalism." *Pro Ecclesia* 20.2 (2011) 167–84.

Loofs, Friedrich. "Kenosis." In vol. 7 of *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, edited by James Hastings, 680b–87b. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914.

Lösel, Steffen. *Kreuzwege: Ein ökumenisches Gespräch mit Hans Urs von Balthasar*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001.

———. "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling: Balthasar's Negative Theology of Revelation." *The Journal of Religion* 82 (2002) 586–616.

Lossky, Vladimir. *In the Image and Likeness of God*. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's, 1985.

———. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church.* Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1976.

Lot-Borodine, Myrrha. *La Déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs*. Bibliothèque Œcuménique 9. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970.

Louth, Andrew. "The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology." In *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, edited by Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, 32–44. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

Luther, Martin. *The Bondage of the Will*. Translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston. Grand Rapids: Revell, 1996.

———. *The Freedom of a Christian*. Translated by Mark D. Tranvik. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008.

———. *Luther's Works*. Edite by Jaroslav Pelikan, et al. St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957–1986.

Lutheran Service Book. Edited by the Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. St. Louis, MI: Concordia, 2006.

Macdonald, George. *The Complete Fairy Tales*. New York: Penguin, 1999.

Mannermaa, Tuomo. "*Theosis* as a Subject of Finnish Luther Research." *Pro Ecclesia* 4.1 (1994) 37–47.

Mansini, Guy. "Rahner and Balthasar on the Efficacy of the Cross." *The Irish Theological Quarterly* 63.3 (1998) 232–49.

Marshall, Bruce D. "Action and Person: Do Palamas and Aquinas agree about the Spirit?" *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 39 (1995) 379–408.

Maximus the Confessor. *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*. Vol. 1. Edited by Nicholas Constas. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.

———. *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*. Translated by Paul M. Blowers and Robert L. Wilken. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2003.

McDermott, Timothy, ed. *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*. Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1989.

———. *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2010.

McInerny, Brendan. "Sharing in Triune Glory: Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics and Deification." *Cithara* 52.1 (2012) 50–64.

McSorley, Harry J. *Luther: Right or Wrong?: An Ecumenical-Theological Study of Luther's Major Work, The Bondage of the Will*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1969.

Meconi, David Vincent. *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013.

Meyendorff, John. *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*. 2nd ed. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1979.

Migne, Jacques Paul, ed. *Patrologia Graeca*. Paris, 1857–1886.

———. *Patrologia Latina*. Paris, 1844–1855.

Milbank, John. *The Suspended Middle*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God*. Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden. London: SCM, 1974.

Nellas, Panayiotis. *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person*. Translated by Norman Russell. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1997.

Nichols, Aidan. *Christendom Awake*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.

———. *No Bloodless Myth*: *A Guide through Balthasar's Dramatics*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000.

———. *Say It Is Pentecost: A Guide through Balthasar's Logic*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001.

———. *The Shape of Catholic Theology*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991.

Nicola, Alejandro. "Divinization and the Spatial Dimension of Being: Balthasar's Reading of Gregory of Nisa." *Teologia Y Vida* 50.1–2 (2009) 451–61.

Oakes, Edward T. "'He Descended into Hell': The Depths of God's Self-Emptying Love on Holy Saturday in the Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar." In *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying God*, edited by C. Stephen Evans, 218–45. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

———. "The Internal Logic of Holy Saturday in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9.2 (2007) 184–99.

O'Hanlon, Gerard F. *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Ortiz, Jared. "Deification in the Latin Fathers." In *Called to Be the Children of God: The Catholic Theology of Human Deification*, edited by David Meconi and Carl E. Olson, 59–81. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2016.

Ott, Ludwig. *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*. Translated by Patrick Lynch. Rockford: Tan, 1960.

Ouspensky, Leonid. *Theology of the Icon*. Vol. 1. Translated by Anthony Gythiel. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's, 1992.

Palmer, G. E. H., et al., eds. *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*. Vols. 1–2. London: Faber and Faber, 1979, 1981.

Papanikolaou, Aristotle. *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006.

Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Translated by A. J. Krailsheimer. New York: Penguin, 1995.

Paul VI. "Gaudium et Spes." Constitution. December 7, 1965. Online. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

———. "Lumen Gentium." Constitution. November 21, 1964. Online. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

———. "Optatam Totius." Decree. October 28, 1965. Online. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_optatam-totius_en.html.

———. "Sacrosanctum Concilium." Constitution. December 4, 1963. Online. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

———. "Unitatis Redintegratio." Decree. November 21, 1964. Online. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html.

Pereira, Silvio do Socorro de Almeida. *La divinizzazione come criterio ermeneutico della soteriologia drammatica di Hans Urs von Balthasar.* Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2014.

Pieper, Josef. *Josef Pieper: An Anthology.* San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989.

Pitstick, Alyssa Lyra. *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Pitstick, Alyssa Lyra, and Edward T. Oakes. "Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy: An Exchange." *First Things* 168 (2006) 25–31.

Polkinghorne, John, ed. *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001.

Prestige, G. L. *God in Patristic Thought*. London: SPCK, 1959.

Przywara, Erich. *Analogia Entis*: *Metaphysics—Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*. Translated by John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014.

Pujos, Nathanaël. *La «Kénose » du Père chez H. U. von Balthasar*: *Genèse et limites*. Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2013.

Rahner, Karl. *Theological Investigations*. Vol. 1. Translated by Cornelius Ernst. London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1961.

Ratzinger, Joseph. "The Beauty and the Truth of Christ." *L'Osservatore Romano*, November 6, 2002.

———. *Eschatology*: *Death and Eternal Life*. 2nd ed. Translated by M. Waldstein. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988.

———. *Introduction to Christianity*. Translated by J. R. Foster. London: Burns & Oates, 1969.

———. *The Nature and Mission of Theology.* Translated by Adrian Walker. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995.

———. *Principles of Catholic Theology*. Translated by Mary Frances McCarthy. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987.

———. *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000.

Russell, Norman. *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

———. *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2009.

———. "The Reception of Palamas in the West Today." *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 3 (2012) 7–21. http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/press/theologia/material/2012_3_3_Russell.pdf.

Sara, Juan M. *Forma y amor: Un estudio metafisico sobre la trilogia de Hans Urs von Balthasar*. Roma: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 2000.

Schaff, Philip, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom*. Vol. 2. New York: Harper, 1932.

Schindler, David C. *The Catholicity of Reason*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013.

———. *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004.

Schindler, David L. "Towards a Eucharistic Evangelization." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 19 (1992) 549–75.

Schmemann, Alexander. *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1973.

Scola, Angelo. "L'apporto della teologia di Hans Urs von Balthasar alla nuova evangelizzazione." In *Eine Theologie für das 21. Jahrhundert: Zur Wirkungsgeschichte Hans Urs von Balthasars*, 150–72. Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 2014.

Sherrard, Philip. *The Greek East and the Latin West: A Study in the Christian Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1938.

Sokolowski, Robert. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Sophrony, Archimandrite. *His Life is Mine*. Translated by Rosemary Edmonds. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1997.

Speyr, Adrienne von. *The Word: A Meditation on the Prologue to St. John's Gospel*. London: Collins, 1953.

Staniloae, Dumitru. *The Experience of God*. Vol. 6. Translated by Ioan Ionita. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross, 2013.

———. *Orthodox Spirituality*. Translated by Archimandrite Jerome and Otilia Kloos. South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's, 2003.

———. *Theology and the Church*. Translated by Robert Barringer. New York: St. Vladimir's, 1980.

Taft, Robert F. "Mass without the Consecration? The Historic Agreement on the Eucharist between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East Promulgated 26 October 2001." In *Liturgical Renewal as a Way to Christian Unity*, edited by James F. Puglisi, 482–509. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2005.

Tanner, Norman, ed. *Nicaea I to Lateran V*. Vol. 1 of *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990.

Vasileous of Stavronikita, Archimandrite. *Hymn of Entry*. Translated by Elizabeth Briere. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1984.

Vattimo, Gianni. *After Christianity*. Translated by Luca D'Isanto. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

Viladesau, Richard. "Theosis and Beauty." *Theology Today* 65.2 (2008) 180–90.

Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele: Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen*. 3 vols. 3rd ed. Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1998.

———. *The Christian State of Life*. Translated by Mary Frances McCarthy. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983.
———. *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*. Translated by Brian E. Daley. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003.
———. *Dare We Hope "That All Men May Be Saved?"* Translated by David Kipp and Lothar Krauth. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988.
———. *Does Jesus Know Us—Do We Know Him?* Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983.
———. *Elucidations*. Translated by John Riches. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998.
———. *Engagement with God*. Translated by John Halliburton. London: SPCK, 1975.
———. *Epilogue*. Translated by Edward T. Oakes. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004.
———. *Explorations in Theology*. 4 vols. Translated by Brian McNeil and Edward T. Oakes. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989–1995.
———. "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves." Translated by Edward Oakes. *Communio* 24 (1997) 347–96.
———. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*. 7 vols. Edited by John Riches. Translated by Brian McNeil, et al. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982–1991.
———. *The Grain of Wheat: Aphorisms*. Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995.
———. *Heart of the World*. Translated by Erasmo Leiva. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1979.
———. *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961–1969.
———. *Kosmische Liturgie: Maximus der Bekenner*. Freiburg: Herder, 1941.
———. *Love Alone is Credible*. Translated by D. C. Schindler. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004.
———. *My Work: In Retrospect*. Translated by Brian McNeil. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993.
———. *Mysterium Paschale*. Translated by Aidan Nichols. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990.
———. "Patristik, Scholastik und Wir." *Theologie der Zeit* 3 (1939) 65–104.
———. *Prayer*. Translated by A. V. Littledale. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961.
———. *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*. Translated by Mark Sebanc. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988.
———. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*. 5 vols. Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990–1998.
———. *Theodramatik*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1976–1983.
———. *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*. 3 vols. Translated by Adrian Walker and Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000–2005.
———. *Theologik*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985–1987.
———. *A Theological Anthropology*. Translated by William Glen-Doepel. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967.
———. *A Theology of History*. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963.
———. *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*. Translated by Edward T. Oakes. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992.
———. "Wendung nach Osten." *Stimmen der Zeit* 136 (1939) 32–46.
———. *Word and Redemption: Essays in Theology 2*. Translated by A. V. Littledale and Alexander Dru. New York: Herder and Herder, 1965.

Walker, Adrian J. "Personal Singularity and the *Communio Personarum*." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31 (2004) 457–79.

Ware, Kallistos. "I Love Therefore I Am." *In Communion* 53 (2009). Online. http://www.incommunion.org/2009/06/23/i-love-therefore-i-am.

———. "Salvation and Theosis in Orthodox Theology." In *Luther et la réforme allemande dans une perspective oecuménique*, edited by W. Schneemelcher, 167–84. Geneva: Éditions du Centre Orthodoxe, 1983.

Webster, John. "Balthasar and Karl Barth." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, edited by Edward T. Oakes and David Moss, 241–55. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

White, Thomas Joseph, ed. *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011.

———. "Jesus' Cry on the Cross and His Beatific Vision." *Nova et Vetera* 5.3 (2007) 555–82.

Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

Williams, Anna N. *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Williams, Thomas D., and Jan Olof Bengtsson. "Personalism." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Spring 2014 ed. Online. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/personalism.

Zizioulas, John. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's, 1997.

———. "Lessons on Christian Dogmatics." Notes taken from the lectures of Professor John Zizioulas at the Poemantic Division of the Thessaloniki University's School of Theology, 1984–1985. Online. http://oode.info/english/dogmatiki1/D1a.htm.